

THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO
ST. LUKE
IN
THE
AMERICAN
AND ROSS, M.A.

A DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTARY

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D., and

the Ven. Archdeacon A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE

I.—XI.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. J. M. E. ROSS, M.A.

Author of "A Devotional Commentary on 1 Peter," etc.



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PREFATORY NOTE

THE following pages are constantly indebted to the learned Commentary of Dr Plummer (*International Critical Commentary*) and to the work of Dr A. B. Bruce (in the *Expositor's Greek Testament* and otherwise). The Rev. S. C. Carpenter's *Christianity according to St Luke* appeared in time to be of very real use.

In view of the devotional and practical purpose of this Commentary, very little space is given to critical questions, and as little as possible to harmonistic problems. On these points the reader is referred to the critical commentaries. Here the Gospel is taken as it stands, and an attempt is made to elicit its value for faith and love. Renan's saying that this is the most beautiful book in existence is often quoted : not so familiar are the companion phrases in which he speaks of its ingredients of laughter, of tears, of song, of worship : "*c'est l'hymne du peuple nouveau, l'hosanna des petits et des humbles, introduits dans le royaume de*

Prefatory Note

Dieu." It is hoped that this Commentary may in some measure kindle worship at the fire of the worship which is in the Gospel, and help to reveal the thing which in this beautiful Book is most beautiful—the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

J. M. E. R.

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St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
1-4.
Many
Attempts.

1. In those days *there were many attempts at Gospel-writing*. "Many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us" (R.V.). One wonders whether in the phrase "many have taken in hand" there is not a touch of gentle disdain: they took the difficult task in hand but did not carry it through: they took it in hand but with inadequate care and insufficient equipment. Be that as it may, of the many who wrote before and around and after St Luke, only four have survived within the New Testament Canon, their pages more precious than fine gold. There were reasons for this widespread impulse towards the production of Gospels. Time was passing—there was a fear lest the foundation facts should be forgotten. Christianity was spreading—lands far from the original scene of events were thirsting for information. The first witnesses were dying off and a second generation was entering upon the Christian heritage—there was need to put into the hands of those who had not seen and yet had believed a clear, accurate and sufficient version of the historical events upon which their faith was founded. These motives worked upon St Luke's heart and mind: he also would set himself to trace and tell the marvellous story.

Training
for the
Task.

2. St Luke was in *a specially advantageous position for the acquirement of knowledge* on the great theme. "They delivered the facts unto us, they who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." It is worth while in passing to note

An Evangelist's Preface

the modesty of our Evangelist's claim for himself : **Luke i.** he does not claim to be of other than the second **1-4.** generation of believers : he is a recipient, not an original observer. His frankness on this point helps to give us the feeling of being on historic ground : had there been aught of fraud or forgery here, it would have been easy to pose as one of the original circle. He was only a transmitter ; yet as the comrade and friend of St Paul, as the fellow-servant of many other "servants of the word," he was in an admirable position for receiving what was best worth transmitting. He had his training so, not only in the facts but in the theology of the facts, and in the practical evangelism which ranged and prized the facts according to their evangelic value. He too, being a servant of the word, and a comrade of servants of the word, knew the things that helped and healed : he handled as an evangelist and not merely as a literary man the parable of the lost sheep and the story of the woman that was a sinner, and all the message of miraculous grace. So his Gospel, which is specially the Gospel of the Grace of the Lord Jesus, took its special colour and proportion.

3. It is worth noting that the only claim he **Task and** makes for himself here is in regard to *a scholar's* **Toil.** *care and thoroughness* in his chosen task. "It seemed good to me, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order." If ever a book has proved its inspiration by its inspiringness, that book is this Gospel ; yet there is no hint that any help from

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i. Above released the author from ordinary care and
i-4. scholarly thoroughness. He searched things out: he took trouble to secure accurate information. Evidently he worked with certain documents before him. We may be pretty certain about three of these—an Aramaic Gospel of the Infancy, our Gospel of St Mark, and the Book of Sayings, which, according to very ancient testimony, lay behind our first Gospel. Probably he had other sources as well, oral or written. The point is that he neither seeks nor receives any dispensation from toil and care: he sits down with rolls and records beside him: his claim is that he has put good work into his task.

The Oral Gospel.

4. The last point to which this preface bears witness, and it is not the least interesting, is *the existence of the Oral Gospel* which preceded this and all written records. We do not know how early written Gospels began to appear: of our four, the earliest could not have been in existence much less than thirty years after the Crucifixion. St Luke probably wrote his somewhere about the year 80, though he based it on earlier documents. But the gap was bridged by the oral teaching, which lies behind the whole New Testament. That oral teaching was largely historical in its character: if sometimes we wonder why in St Paul's letters there are comparatively few references to the events of Our Lord's life and ministry, we find the explanation in this oral teaching, which went before the letters and which the letters took for granted. Theophilus was one of those so taught. "It

An Evangelist's Preface

seemed good to me to write unto thee in order that **Luke i.** thou mightest know the certainty concerning the **1-4.** things which thou wast taught by word of mouth" (R.V. marg.). Theophilus may have been a wealthy patron: "most excellent" may be not a mere politeness but a hint of official dignity, "your Excellency." But, whoever he was, he had been taught orally the Christian facts, and here was material for his more exact knowledge and more thorough study.

The verb here is that from which our English **Happy** word *catechise* directly comes. Paul also uses it **Pastures.** in Romans (ii. 18) when he speaks of the Jew as being "instructed out of the law." As one reads the phrase one can hear the droning of the pupils in the Jewish schools, repeating ancient words and legal maxims, until exact repetition has made these things a permanent possession. Here is a new and happier instruction,—not legal but evangelical, not dry as the dust of ages but fresh as life's clear well-spring,—the story of Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, the Saviour of the World. Can one depict the eagerness with which a quickened soul, who had already learned some of the facts, would welcome the written record which was to lead him farther into fields so fresh and fair?

So this preface shows us an Evangelist in his workshop. Let it be repeated that the very quietness and modesty of his opening helps us to feel that we are on historic ground. It is thus good for us to see the mechanism of his working. Yet the glory of his book is not its mechanism, but that

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i. great Reality which glows and shines on every
i-4. page, and in which mechanism is swallowed up of
life—the Grace of the Lord Jesus.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Almighty God, Who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist and Physician of the soul: May it please Thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Book of Common Prayer.

II

THE GOSPEL OF THE NATIVITY

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the

St Luke i.—xi.

presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men. And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted

The Gospel of the Nativity

Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. . . . And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house. Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upou her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judæa. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him. . . . And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel. And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David :) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped Him in

St Luke i.—xi.

swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger ; because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them : and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not : for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you ; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. . . . And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, His name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before He was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord ; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord ;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon ; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel : and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple : and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law, Then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God. . . . And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the

The Gospel of the Nativity

tribe of Aser ; she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity ; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom : and the grace of God was upon Him."—LUKE i. 5-45, 56-66, 80 ; ii. 1-12, 15-27, 36-40.

. The following three studies are based on the prose narrative. The Songs, in which the devotional message of the Incarnation comes to its focus, are reserved for separate treatment : see Chap. iii-vi., *The Symphony of Welcome*.

(i.)

MEMOIRS OF OLD TESTAMENT PIETY

OUR business for the moment is to recapture an **Luke i.** atmosphere—the atmosphere of these two first **5-45, 56-66, 80 ;** chapters of the Gospel.

1. To begin with, it is obviously a *Hebrew* **ii. 1-12, 15-27, 36-40.** atmosphere. St Luke was a Greek : his style is **Hebrew Piety.** Greek not only in speech, but in the thought which lies deeper than speech : to take but one instance, the feeling for the sea and interest in all matters nautical, which reveal themselves so clearly in certain sections of the Book of Acts, could never have been expressed by a Hebrew—they belong to the Greek, not the Jewish atmosphere. Now much of the third Gospel was with equal obviousness written by a Greek ; but here in the first two chapters the atmosphere is Jewish. Even though

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i. the words are Greek the line of thought and the
5-45, 56- structure of phrase are for the most part Hebrew.
66, 80 ; Therefore our scholars have come to believe that
ii. 1-12, the Evangelist had before him a document—an
15-27, Aramaic Gospel of the Infancy. "Luke," says
36-40. Sir William Ramsay, "was translating into Greek
a Hebrew narrative, re-thinking it and then ex-
pressing it." These pages, then, are in the first
instance memoirs of Hebrew piety. From what
source did this special information come into the
hand of St Luke? He does not tell us, but there
is an old theory, to which even some modern experts
still cling, that Mary the Mother of Jesus may have
opened her heart to the beloved Physician. If
she was alive at the time when he wrote, it is
difficult to believe that so careful a collector of
information would not have made his way to her :
if she was gone, it is equally difficult to believe that
he would not have made enquiry among her circle
of friends.

**A Holy
Continuity.**

2. Being a Hebrew atmosphere it is of course
an *Old Testament* atmosphere : the old dispensation
shines before us here at its last and best. Many of
the words and phrases are Old Testament echoes :
it is impossible to miss the close verbal parallels
between the Magnificat—"My soul doth magnify
the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my
Saviour," and the Song of Hannah—"My heart
rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the
Lord : my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies
because I rejoice in Thy salvation." But more
important than any verbal resemblance is a certain

The Gospel of the Nativity

continuity of spirit: the devout soul of Old Luke i. Testament piety is laid open before us here. Not 5-45, 56- all the Jewish piety of the period was so beautiful 66, 80; as this: much of it was encased in the hard shell ii. 1-12, of formalism: much of it had faded to a pallid 15-27, worldliness. But the true soul of the older dis- 36-40. pensation was kept alive in such personalities as those of Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary, Simeon, and Anna—spiritual, earnest, believing, expectant. Not in vain had the flame of faith burned through the long night of expectation if now, at the cock-crow, it was still, in some souls at least, so clear and pure. And in these souls the Old Testament era at its best leans forward, with the morning in its eyes, to embrace and welcome the New.

3. Being an Old Testament atmosphere, the atmosphere of these chapters is *one of humility*. Perhaps *meekness* is the right word to use. The climate which most resembles that in which Zacharias and his friends lived is the climate of Psalm xxxiv.: they all thankfully fit into their places among the souls who make their boast in the Lord, the souls who look unto Him and are lightened and their faces are not ashamed, the poor folk who cry and the Lord hears them and delivers them out of all their troubles. This meekness is not a merel; negative quality: there are some strong and splendid things about it. One discerns obedience and self-discipline: "They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (i. 6). One sees a habit and atmosphere of prayer:

Where they
made their
Boast.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

“ Fear not, Zacharias, thy prayer is heard ” (i. 13). Here is a dignified submissiveness : “ Behold the handmaid of the Lord ; be it unto me according to Thy word ” (i. 38). Here is a certain thoughtful reserve : “ Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart ” (ii. 19). Here is a loyal expectation that wears out the years : “ Simeon . . . was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel ” (ii. 25). Meekness is the comprehensive word which gathers all these elements into itself. These souls did not dress themselves with pomp, nor did they expect to take any share in world-shaking events of State. But they lived near to their God : their lives were at His disposal for the fulfilment of His purpose ; and they were chosen to provide the welcome for the new-born Truth.

Songs of
His
Faithfulness.

4. Last but not least, here is an atmosphere of *praise*. There is not only a song to welcome the Holy Child, but a symphony of song. These songs are so rich in devotional value that they merit each a separate treatment, but it is a very amazing thing to find in this setting so much that Christendom is singing still. One begins to suspect that the place where these souls lived, though it may have been outwardly plain and poor, had certain residential advantages, one being that it was not far from that grove of singing birds which was also so conveniently adjacent to the House Beautiful. Christiana thought she heard in that grove a most curious melodious note, with words much like these :—

The Gospel of the Nativity

“Through all my life Thy favour is
So frankly show'd to me,
That in Thy house for evermore
My dwelling-place shall be.”

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

And, listening still, she thought she heard another answer it, saying :—

“For why ? the Lord our God is good,
His Mercy is for ever sure :
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.”

So Christiana asked Prudence what it was that made those curious notes. They are, said she, our country birds : they sing these notes at the spring, when the flowers appear, and the sun shines warm : they are very fine company for us when we are melancholy.

Zacharias and Elisabeth, Mary and Simeon and Anna—they and such as they knew their way into that grove of song where all the voices tell of God's faithfulness. The true meeting-place of the Old Testament and the New is in lives such as these, which illustrate the blessedness of the poor in spirit, whose is the kingdom of heaven, the blessedness of the hungry and thirsty—who shall be filled. And we find our own path into that atmosphere of praise when, having learned our deepest needs, we discover also the greatness of God's giving and His faithfulness to His compassionate promises.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.

5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;

ii. 1-12,

15-27,

36-40.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAISE

God is not like Man, but in whatsoever He promises, He approves Himself most faithfull, both in His abilitie and performances. I will therefore ever trust God on His bare word ; even with hope besides hope, above hope, against hope.

Joseph Hall

(ii.)

THE MINGLING OF TWO WORLDS

The
Trembling
of the
Veil.

If these two chapters were only memoirs of Old Testament piety, precious and beautiful as they might be, they would not have taken so honoured a place in the records of the faith. To the Evangelist and to us they have the larger part of their significance because they are written round a point of time at which two worlds met and mingled. They tell of portents, apparitions, tremblings of the veil,—as if God's messengers were busy preparing the way of their King. They thus provide a suitable environment for the Manger and Him Who lies in it—the Word made flesh, the Unseen revealed, the Eternal Love become incarnate for us men and for our salvation. If heaven is busy round about such an hour, to prepare for it beforehand and to enhance it when it comes, there is something divinely natural even in what we, for lack of a better word, call supernatural. This we may admit, even though we recognise the difficulty of

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telling in outward speech the things that transcend Luke i.
normal experience. 5-45, 56-

Two worlds !—take a moment to bid imagination ¹ 66, 80 ;
awake and glance at the nearer of the two, the one ii. 1-12,
we know best. Think of the world of men and 15-27,
women as it lay beneath God's sky in that far-off 36-40.
generation. Open inward eyes and *see* the people The World
who lived in the world of that day when Mary the we know.
Virgin of Nazareth was betrothed to a man named
Joseph—young and old, white and black, bond
and free ; some of them following peaceful occupa-
tions at the bench and the plough ; some of them
clad in armour and at the bidding of Cæsar the Lord
of War ; some of them with weeping faces, as if
life had dealt hardly with them ; some all smiles
and laughter, as if they were well content with
existence and had need of nothing. Open inward
ears and *hear* the noises of the world into which
there was to break the music of the Angels' Song :
then, as now, it was a noisy world, and the largest
part of its noise was made by human tongues.
Listen to them talking, at the street corners, through
the open windows of the houses, in the market
places where men bargain and chaffer. Not all
the noises are pleasant : we can hear fierce angry
voices, swearing and blaspheming, quarrels of
partisans, cries and moans of the under dog, words
of command and shouts of rebellion, loud voices

¹ Those who know the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola will recognise the indebtedness of these paragraphs to him in his "Contemplation" of the Incarnation : let us learn even from those from whom we differ most profoundly, where they and we are one in faith and love.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
5-45, 66-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

that heed no master, proud voices that assert themselves in the very face of heaven. Shut ears again and open eyes and watch the *doings* of that world. It is an active world, bustling like an anthill—that world into which there went out the decree that all should be taxed. Some are going about their honest work. Some are smiting. Some are slaying. Some are making money. Some are making tracks for far countries to spend their portion of goods. Some are travelling downwards to the gulf that hath no bottom. Some are climbing upwards in the footprints of the prophets and the saints.

The Higher
Order
breaks in.

This may all seem of small importance in itself ; yet it may be helpful to let our imaginations awaken so and re-create the world of the time, for it is all a background for the intrusion and display of another world and another order. *Another order is breaking into this order : another world is working for the welfare of this world.* St Luke would bid us have eyes and ears for this higher realm of activity. He would have us open our eyes to behold the God of Eternal Compassion, watching all this panorama more closely than we have now watched it, and perceiving, as we might not have perceived it, man's mortal, desperate need. He would have us open our ears to overhear the mandate which sent a message and an honourable, awful charge to the little house at Nazareth. He would have us open our eyes again, and when we try to picture what the world of that day was doing he would not have us leave out what the Lord God of Israel

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was doing to work out the redemption of His people and of mankind. So the noise and colour and movement of the visible world become a frame for something very different from them, which nevertheless appears in the midst of them and makes itself a part of them. Into this proud, pushing world, so intent on its own aims and purposes, Gabriel wings his quiet flight, intent only on his errand of obedience. And if we are tired of the noise of those streets and market-places, of those voices of greed and of strife, we may come out on the Judean ridge under the peaceful stars, and listen to the herald angels singing of the newborn Saviour. Two worlds have met and it is the most thrilling hour since the birth of time.

If we may judge that higher world by the glimpses we get of it here, it has some qualities which this lower world might well envy and desire. It overflows with encouragement for lowly souls who long to do the will of God yet stand in awe of His Majesty: it signals, "Fear not" (i. 13), and again "Fear not" (i. 30), and yet again "Fear not" (ii. 10). It is a world of simple and instant obedience, where power and pride have nothing in common: "I am Gabriel . . . and I am sent" (i. 19). It is a world which has different standards of greatness from those prevailing among men: it ranks prophets higher than Kings and a Saviour higher than them all: "He shall be great and shall be filled with the Holy Ghost" (i. 15). "He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest" (i. 32). It is a world which does not

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

As it is
in Heaven.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

hide its most splendid revelations from the poor and humble : “ there were shepherds abiding in the field, and lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon *them*, and the glory of the Lord shone round about *them* ” (ii. 9). It is a world of worship and of joy ; we get a view of it for one moment in that familiar glimpse—how familiar and yet how unfathomable !—of the heavenly host praising God and singing, “ Glory to God in the highest ” (ii. 14). But its chief splendour lies in this that it is already beginning to penetrate this lower world, and to establish itself upon this mortal level. Mary already shares its spirit when she says, “ Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to Thy word ” (i. 38). The Shepherds catch the note of its worship when they return from Bethlehem, glorifying and praising God. That Upper World, now penetrating these lower levels, is not only a world of obedience and worship and joy, it is above all a world of love, whose happy task it is to give itself away, and its chief proof and sign is not angel nor song nor star, but the Child Who for love’s sake took our nature and was born among us.

What our
World
needed.

See the world of that day as we have tried to see it. Hear it as we have tried to hear its noisy voices. Then set this Child in the midst of it, so quiet, so pure, so gentle. Was He not what the world needed then ? Is He not what our world to-day, as noisy, as burdened, as evil as that world of long ago, needs now, and shall need to the last syllable of recorded time ? There is hope for this world if that other world mingles with it : apart

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from that our world is left in its sins and sorrows, **Luke i.**
and the last word upon its affairs is with Chaos **5-45, 56-**
and old Night. **66, 80 ;**

ii. 1-12,

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAISE

15-27,

36-40.

“He took not on Him the nature of Angels,
but He took on Him the seed of Abraham.” . . .
They, every way, in everything else, above and
before us ; in this, beneath and behind us. And
we, unworthy, wretched men that we are,
above and before the Angels, the Cherubim, the
Seraphim, and all the Principalities and Thrones,
in this dignity. This being beyond the rules
and reach of all reason is surely matter of
astonishment ; saith St Chrysostom, “This it
casteth me into an ecstasy, and maketh me to
imagine of our nature some great matter, I
cannot well express what.”

Lancelot Andrewes

(iii.)

THE HOLY BIRTH

We have watched the setting of the scene for **The**
an Event in which two worlds are interested : now **Turning-**
we turn to the Event itself. Beside the perfect **point of**
beauty and simplicity of the story, all comment is **Time.**
pale and poor. Perhaps there is no passage in the
whole literature of the ages which so gives the
feeling of an unworldly atmosphere. Great powers

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.

5-45, 56-

66, 80 ;

ii. 1-12,

15-27,

36-40.

and pomps are here indeed—Caesar Augustus, who represented in himself all dignity and splendour, and Quirinius the Governor of Syria, in his own little world, alike by his own judgment and that of others, a mighty person. But they are soon left behind—let them stay in the oblivion of their purple. A Mightier Shadow falls across the landscape. God is in His world, and has business with the poor and lowly.

**The Hand-
maid of the
Lord.**

What manner of woman was this Mary, to whom it was said, “Hail, thou that art highly favoured : blessed art thou among women” ? We know but little : perhaps we know as much as we are meant to know when we see one who says in lowly trust and obedience, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.” The Church went far astray in her attitude to the Virgin-mother, misled unconsciously by old superstitions from Phrygia and elsewhere. It was Paganism, baptised perhaps but scarcely Christianised, which advanced Mary to her enthronement in the Church’s devotion : and her dolours, her perfections, the legends of her mighty deeds, the ceaseless invocation of her name, are with us unto this day. It ought to be sufficient for us that all this is foreign to the New Testament : indeed, at point after point, the New Testament seems expressly to guard against it. On the other hand, Protestantism, in revolt against exaggeration and superstition, has often rushed to the opposite extreme and sometimes seems afraid even to mention Mary’s name. For the moment we are only concerned with her so far as revealed in this

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Gospel of the Infancy. We may be sure she was **Luke i.**
pure-minded, warm-hearted, great-souled, else the **5-45, 56-**
pure and perfect Pattern of our humanity had **56, 80 ;**
not been given so intimately into her keeping. **ii. 1-12,**
God does not choose His instruments at random ; **15-27,**
for His great tasks He has elect souls : He does **36-40.**
not command coarse and careless hands to do
His finest and most delicate work. And Dante
Rossetti's lines sum up what Mary must surely
have been :

“Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect,
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful ; wise in charity ;
Strong in grave peace ; in pity circumspect ;
So held she through her girlhood, as it were
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet.”

Next to the “devout respect” for God's will, the story reflects a certain grace of grave thoughtfulness. “Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” “His Mother kept all these sayings in her heart.” These qualities must have been shaping in her through the years of her youth ; and when at length her task came to her and the Power of the Highest overshadowed her, she was ready in heart and mind.

As we follow Joseph and Mary on their journey **The Shadow**
to Bethlehem, it becomes apparent that even at **on the Joy.**
the Nativity the Cross cannot be hidden. God
invades His world, but the world excludes its
King. “She laid Him in a manger, because there

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.

5-45, 56-

66, 80 ;

ii. 1-12,

15-27,

36-40.

was no room for them in the inn." Some would read "in the guest-chamber": it is the same word used afterwards of the room prepared for the Last Supper (xxii. 11). But be it public inn or private guest-chamber, nothing can quite take away the pathos, in such a connection, of the words

* "No room." Perhaps there was no one to blame: then, as later, He was among men as One Whom they knew not. And yet it is like so much that happens still when angel-pinions beat "at our clay-shuttered doors." It was like so much that happened afterwards in the experience of the Master Himself. It makes one think of the brow of the hill above Nazareth, of the Samaritan village that would not receive Him, of the Gadarenes who bade Him depart out of their coasts, of Jerusalem and how she sent Him to die outside the gate. That is why the world misses so much and with all its wealth is poor and restless—because it has no room for the Best. And it is partly because He knows what it means to be shut out that He hastens with urgent feet to the people who say to Him, "There is room in my heart for Thee."

But if the Nativity cannot hide the Cross, there are two other things which it cannot hide.

* The Back-ground of Glory.

1. Its lowly circumstances cannot conceal *the Glory from which He came*. Messengers from eternity haunted our low world that night; Shepherds of Bethlehem had their eyes opened to a splendour beyond all human dream and their ears to a proclamation which all the ages had waited to hear. "Fear not, for behold I bring you

* 9. John 1:10-11 - "He came to his own, and his own received him not."

9. Parable of the Sower, Luke 8:5-15 - "... When seeds fall on good soil, the thorns spring up with it and

The Gospel of the Nativity

good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people, **Luke i.**
 for unto you is born this day in the city of David **5-45, 56-**
 a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." Of this **66, 80 ;**
 proclamation Lancelot Andrewes¹ quaintly says : **ii. 1-12,**
 "the Angel delivereth it *evangelizando*, 'church- **15-27,**
 wise' . . . Church-wise, I say, for he doth it by **36-40.**
 a sermon here at this verse ; and then, by hymn
 or anthem after, at the 14th verse. A sermon :
 the Angel himself calls it so. *Evangelizo vobis*,
 'I come to Evangelise, to preach you a gospel' ;
 that first. And presently after he had done his
 sermon, there is the hymn *Gloria in excelsis*, taken
 up by the choir of heaven. The Angel makes the
 one : a multitude of Angels sing the other. The
 whole service of this day, the sermon, the anthem,
 by Angels, all." Is the story, in spite of its
 loveliness and haunting charm, too wonderful to
 be credible by the modern mind ? It would be,
 but for something more amazing still, which is
 matter not of speculation but of history. This
 Child, Who was born at Bethlehem, lived and
 grew up. He taught. He healed. He lived. He
 died. He rose again. *And He is never dwarfed*
even by such a background as this. We see Him
 in poverty, in weakness, in toil, in suffering, in
 death, in all that tests our mortal frailty to the
 uttermost ; yet all the way along His moral and
 spiritual majesty are such that we could never
 wish this prelude cut out of His story. He is
 greater, not less, than His background, even when
 that background opens to show celestial hierarchies

¹ *Fifth Sermon on the Nativity.*

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.
The
Promise
of the
Kingdom.

and choirs of heavenly song ; and even the most radiant of His heralds is ready to veil his face in presence of the King.

2. As little can the lowly Nativity hide *the Kingdom He is going to win*. That Kingdom may be represented here only by a few poor shepherds, simple men, nevertheless they are an instalment and the Kingdom is at hand. St Matthew has his wise men from far, and they have taken their picturesque place in the picture gallery of a world's remembrance : yet St Luke's simple shepherds are even more lovable and delightful. We covet their spirit of eager joy when " they came with haste," and no less the spirit of their impulsive proclamation when " they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen." There is a comforting thought for the poor and unlearned of all the ages in the fact that the first feet which found their way to Bethlehem were those of simple shepherds—poor men with nothing in their hands to bring, unlearned men with no powers of complex thinking, plain men with no official raiment to trail behind them. " The Angel of the Lord came upon *them* and the glory of the Lord shone round about *them*." " I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and Earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

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FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

So, at mine Inne Thy blessed Son
His lodging, Lord, shall take.
And there (much more than I have done)
Him welcome I will make.
For, not a Stable but my Breast
Shall be His Lodging-Roome,
And mine own Heart to give Him rest
A Pallet shall become.

Luke i.
5-45, 56-
66, 80 ;
ii. 1-12,
15-27,
36-40.

George Wither :
Hymn for an Inne-Keeper

III

THE SYMPHONY OF WELCOME: THE MAGNIFICAT

"And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to His seed for ever."—LUKE i. 46-55.

Luke i.
46-55.
The Grove
of Song.

"WHEN the Sun is up," says Samuel Rutherford, "the birds begin to sing." These opening chapters of this Gospel are an illustration. They are a grove of singing-birds, the birds that are awake to greet the dawn. The old-world names which these songs bring with them, and which, though they be Latin, are as familiar to us as any English words, the *Magnificat*, the *Benedictus*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the *Nunc Dimittis*—are themselves a reminder of the delight taken by the Church of all the ages in these ancient strains. And there is something in

The Symphony of Welcome

them—how shall we name it? Shall we call it **Luke i** the freshness of the morning or the glow of an **46-55.** unextinguishable fire?—which makes most later hymns seem poor and pale beside them. They strike some of the fundamental notes which enable God's choristers through the ages to sing in harmony.

The chief and immediate impression which the *Magnificat* makes upon us is one of joy; for sheer, ^{The Ground of Joy.} overflowing gladness, there is scarcely any hymn, ancient or modern, to compare with it. R. L. Stevenson says that "the ground of a man's joy is often hard to hit." The context is the famous passage about the lantern-bearers—the boys of the village in the dark evenings of autumn, with their bull's-eye lanterns buckled to their belts. His point is one which penetrates far into our human nature—that a large part of the joy of life lies in its romance. Romance is an elusive thing, hard to define. It retreats like a rainbow. It flits like a butterfly. It lurks in all manner of unexpected and unlikely corners, and it refuses sometimes to rest on couches luxuriously spread for its entertainment. A schoolboy may find it with the aid of a smoky lantern; a poet may discover it in the spring or in his lady's eyes; a saint will seek it amid the eternal things. But wherever it is, if we can discover it, we discover joy along with it. Now the *Magnificat* may be said to have for its theme the Romance of the Incarnation. That is why it is so full of gladness.

1. Before we are more than over the threshold

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
46-55.
God and
the Soul.

of the song, we meet two facts which are brimful of romance. They are *God* and *the Soul*. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." God and the soul; God possessing the soul, and the soul rejoicing in God and His salvation—these things seen and understood are rich in a romance beside which all poets' dreams and travellers' tales pale their ineffectual fires. Here are discoveries. Here are quests and conquests. Here are treasure-mines and beacon-fires. And herein lies a large element in the romance of the Incarnation. It is God drawing near to the souls of men. It is God taking His chosen way of appealing to the human soul. We marvel at the gentleness of that way—not with pomp and circumstance, not with thunder and the sound of a trumpet, but in the lowliness of a little Child. But we acknowledge the reasonableness of the way—clothing the Divine Purity and Love with flesh and blood for men to see and follow so that they might be reached through their consciences and affections. These Songs in the Gospel of the Infancy are an expression of the way in which some souls at least leaped forth to greet the God Who loved their souls. And such hymnody will not be too ecstatic for us—if we have seen the same romantic thing, the worth of our souls to the heart of God and the price He paid to make them His own.

God and
the Humble.

2. There is another element in the romance of the Incarnation. If we name the first *God and the soul*, we may call the second *God and the humble*.

The Symphony of Welcome

The *Magnificat* is the song of the humble—those **Luke i.** who have neither pomp nor pride, neither power **46-55.** nor wealth, but who lay their own souls as their offering at God's feet. This hymn is the anthem of their triumph, the charter of their vindication. "He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." Here the romance of the Incarnation largely lay for the first generation of Christians at least: God passed by the great and the mighty: it was to the humble, the quiet and the poor, not to those who wore the purple and wielded the sword and made the world ring with their heavy tread, that He gave the immediate honour and joy of receiving His unspeakable gift.

There is a certain revolutionary element in this, **The Divine Revolution.** the revelation of another standard of judgment, another test of values, another Kingdom and power and glory than those that prevailed among men. The privileges of God's Kingdom are not for the people of the purple robe, but for those of the contrite heart. The control of the future and the leadership of the world's history—they are not in the last resort for the sword and the throne: they are for the people, whether they be on the throne or in the cottage, who hunger for righteousness more than for bread. The Kingdom that shall endure for ever—it is not Herod's: it is not Caesar's: it is the heritage of the Babe in Mary's bosom, and of all whom this little Child shall lead into

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
46-55.

gentleness, truth and love. It was said in praise of Rousseau: "He makes the poor very proud." Christianity does not make the poor proud, but it makes them blessed.

God and
the Ages.

3. A third element in the romance of the Incarnation is here. Let us call it *God and the ages*. The tramp of the feet of the generations is heard in the rhythm of the song. The storied past is here: "He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spake to our forefathers." But the storied past is only the prelude to an illimitable future: "from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." And here are the magic and the mystery of the whole course of Time—full of change yet full of God, full of earthquakes, landslips and revolutions, yet over-arched by a sky which cannot fall and underbuilt by the things which cannot be shaken: "His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation."

Romance
that is
true.

That is why we, even after so long a time, need not be shut out from the primal joy: when Mary sings *Magnificat*, we may join our hearts with her clear voice. Are not we also among the hungry—among those whose poverty is their plea? And believing as she believed, are not we also among Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise? So Time shrinks and his barriers crumble. Faith and Love have their way of access. The God of our salvation is willing now as then to help His humble folk in remembrance of His mercy. It is wonderful. It is romantic. But it is true.

The Symphony of Welcome

My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Luke i. 46-55.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The Father speaks the Word into the soul,
and when the Son is born, every soul becomes
Mary.

Meister Eckhart

IV

THE SYMPHONY OF WELCOME : THE BENEDICTUS

"And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; As He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; The oath which He sware to our father Abraham, That He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."—LUKE i. 67-79.

Luke i.
67-79.

The Essence
of Religion.

In *The Diary of a Churchgoer*, Lord Courtney of Penwith describes the intellectual and spiritual impression made upon him by hearing the *Benedictus* sung in Church. "The Choir to-day sang divinely the *Benedictus*. . . . In my boyhood, we rarely heard of the *Benedictus*. It was in the Prayer Book, doubtless, but practically never said or

The Symphony of Welcome

sung. Nowadays it is reaccepted in use . . . nor Luke i. is this surprising, for the *Benedictus* surely expressed 67-79. the essence of all religion. . . . And is not the hymn of praise which St Luke gathered into his gospel one of the noblest as well as one of the simplest of Credos? ” *The essence of all religion*—that phrase may be our guide into the devotional value of this song. It is one of the treasures of our devotion. Emerson tells of a certain statue which stood in a public garden. It was of Phosphorus the Light-bringer, and it was full of a strange tranquillity which made men fall silent as they gazed upon it. The sculptor, before he set to work, had risen early one morning and had seen the day break, “grand as the eternity out of which it came.” And his statue was that vision translated into stone. This poet has been out to behold a sunrise more splendid than any that ever poured its fulness over the hills of Moab or flooded Jerusalem with the light of a new day, and he has put his vision not into a statue but into a song. Because that sunrise is the central event of the world’s religious development, it is full of the essence of religion. Let us look at it so.

1. Religion is a *very joyful and thankful thing.* Joy and Praise.
“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people.” One cannot help noticing how easily and spontaneously the New Testament writers break off into *Doxology*. They were near to the facts: the oblivious years had not had time to bury the facts: the Birth, the

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
67-79.

Life, the Cross, the Victory were still near, they were real, they were things which hands still warm had handled and eyes still awake had seen. Perhaps we might recover some of the primitive spontaneity of joy if we too lived close, as close as believing study and loving imagination could take us, to the same fundamental facts. Canon Liddon tells in one of his sermons of a good man who lay dying, and who confessed as the great regret of his life that he had not given more careful study to the life of our Lord in the four Evangelists. If we got back to those facts and really understood their meaning, we might be able to frame our own *Benedictus*, our own *Magnificat*, our own Doxology defying the loud world to silence it.

God sets
the Key.

2. If this song be evidence of the nature of true religion, *true religion begins from the side of God*. If religion be a song, it is God Who has set the key. If it be a life, it is first a gift. "He hath visited. . . . He hath raised up an horn of salvation . . . as He spake." *He did it!*—here we touch the deep heart of things : here is the true philosophy of history and the true fountain of praise : here is the note which Paul and Augustine and Calvin all in their day have sounded, recalling men to the centre and source of all things. He hath visited ! As of old God came to the garden, so now He comes to the wilderness : as in ancient story He came to the tent of Abraham, so now He comes to the huts and hovels of our sin : as once He came to Sinai in smoke and flames, so now He comes once more, not like the lightning but like the light.

The Symphony of Welcome

But a visitor is always dependent upon His welcome. **Luke i.** Even God is dependent upon His welcome. In the **67-79.** great humility of the Incarnation He is content to wait upon our welcome. But if there is a welcome His visiting becomes an abiding: He will come and He will stay.

3. If religion in its essence is before us in this **History and Continuity.** song, then *religion is a historical thing*. It is personal, of course, else it is nothing at all, yet it is more—it is historical. This song is saturated with history. Its margins are full of the figures of storied saints and uncounted, unnamed believers: Abraham is here and David; the prophets are here and “our fathers”; the Covenant is here and the Promise. All the mighty past is here, to be at once the seed and the shell of the future. Now we, who are neither Goths nor Vandals, can appreciate the value of this historic continuity. There is change in all living religion—the shedding of the husk and the growing of the flower, the passing of forms and the unfolding of substances, the ever-clearer unveiling of the light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. But there is also continuity—and it deserves more meditation and thanksgiving than we commonly give to it. We too write our names with humble thankfulness beneath those of Abraham and David, the prophets, the apostles, and the saints. We do not make experiment on untried mysteries. We have heard with our ears and our fathers have told us. We must do full justice to their experience and not cast their witness lightly away.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.

67-79.

The
Difference
to Life.

4. Yet if again we may judge the essence of religion by this song, *religion is a practical thing*; it makes a mighty difference to life. Notice how full the Song is of words which reflect that difference. There is the word *Salvation*—"He hath raised up an horn of salvation for us." There is *Redemption*, a word with history in it, with Egypt in it, with Pharaoh's chariots in it, and the Red Sea spume, and Miriam's timbrel—a word used often before but waiting to be used again as soon as God shall excel Himself and do something worthy to be a climax to all the past: "He hath visited and redeemed His people." Now, if we incline to find in such words a touch of Jewish externalism, and the thought of a visible kingdom victorious over outward foes, we shall find in this same musical company of words others which demand an ethical and spiritual interpretation. *Holiness and righteousness*—"that we might serve Him without fear in Holiness and Righteousness all the days of our life." That would be Salvation and Redemption in one, if God's grace would make it so. And then as the Song sweeps on to its close, two more words come in, very short, very simple, but very rich in music and in meaning, the words *Light* and *Peace*: "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." The point is that we have here the expression of the assurance that a religion had come into the world with Christ which was to make a difference to life, and such a difference. If we do not know what these great

The Symphony of Welcome

words mean — salvation, redemption, holiness, Luke i. righteousness, light and peace, we have need that 67-79. Christ should be born in us, bringing with Him the interpretation of these things and the gift that includes them all.

5. The song ends upon its keynote, as it is the way of music to do. “God hath *visited* His people” was the opening strain; now the music returns upon itself: “the Dayspring from on high *hath visited us*.” It is the hour—the holy, awful, joyful hour of man’s visitation. There are visitors and visitors. There are visitors unwelcome for their own sake—the scandalmonger, the bore, the spy. There are visitors unwelcome for their errand’s sake—the messenger of rebuke, the harbinger of bad fortune. But this is very different—the Dayspring hath visited us: Homer used to speak about rosy-fingered morning, and a visitor like that is a heart’s delight. Such a Visitor is here. Yet even He is dependent upon His welcome. Happy the hands that do not draw the blinds nor bolt the doors: happy the hearts that do not turn Him away!

The Visit
of the
Dayspring.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Lord, let light go before, and let love come after; yea, take us by the hand, and lead us by Thy counsels, and come to our Mansoul, and do as it pleaseth Thee.

The People of Mansoul to Emmanuel their Prince.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke i.
67-79.

Go, return to your houses in peace. I will possess myself of your castle of Mansoul and will set my soldiers over you : yea, I will yet do things in Mansoul that cannot be paralleled in any nation, country or kingdom under heaven.

The Prince's Reply.

V

THE SYMPHONY OF WELCOME: GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—LUKE ii. 13, 14.

WE return to the fellowship of the simple Shepherds **Luke ii. 13, 14.** to hear the sweetest song that was ever sung. If we marvel at the election of God which made such men the first auditors, we may recall ourselves to the fact that the race of shepherds, from Moses at Horeb and David on these very hills of Bethlehem, has been by no means unaccustomed to visions and revelations: simplicity has not implied ignorance or shallowness or unfitness to receive. Besides, as G. K. Chesterton tells us, there are some things “too important to be entrusted to the educated classes.” Perhaps the music of the Angels’ song was one of those things: sophisticated men might have interposed all manner of questions, might have reasoned out excuses for delay, might have stood upon proprieties and waited for official sanctions. But these simple souls were simply themselves. They were as little children.

One somehow likes to think of it as a “wonderful

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
13, 14.
Stars and
Song.

clear night of stars " when this thing happened. And if fancy may peer yet farther between the lines of what is written, one wonders whether there came into the thoughts of any of these devout and simple souls that ancient Hymn of a Starry Night: " When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with glory and honour. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth ! " Whether they thought of it or not, there could have been no finer intellectual preparation for their new experience. Never were these words to receive so perfect a fulfilment. And suddenly the glory burst forth, and the stars themselves seemed to become a song.

Pure
Praise.

1. " Glory to God in the highest "—it is a lesson in *pure praise*. Perhaps we ought to expect that, if indeed in these words celestial worship is made audible to mortal ears. Our songs are apt to be weighted with the pain of the world. They are apt to be introspective, cumbered with doubts, difficulties, perplexities, the Ego in pain, the Ego in chains :

" Thy secret voice invites me still
The sweetness of Thy yoke to prove ;
And fain I would ; but though my will
Seems fixed, yet wide my passions rove,
Yet hindrances strew all the way ;
I aim at Thee, yet from Thee stray."

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There is nothing of that here : as Faber sagaciously **Luke ii.** remarks, the Angels in their song "made no mention **13, 14.** of themselves, only of God in the highest, then of men 'on earth.'" The *Weltschmerz* will return, and introspection will be needed sometimes by sinners turning into saints and by seekers and strugglers in search of their heritage, but for the moment we listen with the Shepherds to this burst of pure praise. It sets a standard for all time, though we struggle slowly up to it out of our entangled and discordant life. It sets moving a thrill of cosmic gladness to which our hearts vibrate still.

2. "And on earth, peace"—the hymn is at **Peace Proclaimed.** once praise and *proclamation*. It is one of the calamities of textual criticism that we are not quite sure what the exact form of the second strain ought to be. We let go with much reluctance the familiar and beloved cadence—"Good will toward men." But the weight of manuscript evidence is towards another reading which gives us "Peace on earth to men of His favour," *i.e.* men whom He favours. Two things in the song are clear and unalterable—the "Glory" and the "Peace." For the rest, perhaps the loss is after all not much more than that of a cadence, and in essential meaning there is more gain than loss. Indeed the new reading fits well into the general atmosphere of these chapters, which are full of the quiet and happy confidence that God has found His own, that God and His own have met. "Men whom He favours": is this then favouritism?

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
13, 14.

Not in the least—He has but found those whose spiritual condition makes it possible for Him to choose them, the hungry, the expectant, the loyal, the trustful. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”: that is not favouritism but fitness. And as it makes the atmosphere of these chapters, so it makes the music of the second strain of this Song from the Heights. “Peace on earth to men whom He favours”—because of what happened that illuminated night His believing folk shall have gifts without number and joys without end, but especially that which is the beginning of all else—the peace of hearts to which God Himself has drawn near in reconciliation and in benediction.

The Song
that Grew.

The Church did two things with this lovely but momentary song. She *added* to it. It set the key for so much—she wanted to use it, and liturgical use meant additions, lest the song should be over before the worshippers had properly begun. So in the Greek Liturgies of the fifth century and in the Latin of the eighth we find that the Song of the Angels has grown into a hymn—“We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, Heavenly King, God the Father Almighty”—as we find it in the Communion Office of the Book of Common Prayer and in many of our hymn books. Yet the essence of it all is in the original strain with its unearthly sweetness. When we have piled word on word, and rapture on rapture, what more after all have we said than

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this, "Glory to God in the Highest"? Salvation **Luke ii.** began in His thought of love. Therefore let it **13, 14.** roll back to Him in tides of thanksgiving. For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Whom be glory for ever.

But grace was given to the Church of the early days to *live* the song in a measure that was very wonderful. She lived its spirit of *praise*. She could not help it. She had cosmic reasons for doing so. Theology and doxology go ever together. *Te Deum* and *Gloria in Excelsis* fall silent when men wander far from the Incarnation and the Cross. And so long as men were true, even amid many ignorances and superstitions, to the great Light that came into the world with Christ, they had about their religion something of the primitive joy. Our way back to the joy is by way of the facts: all other alleged roads to the foot of the rainbow are blind alleys. And she also lived the promise of *peace* which the song enshrines. One of the Stoics spoke once about "a peace not of Caesar's proclamation": surely this is it, the peace the Angels sang, the peace believing hearts received, peace which meant not mere absence of strife but a heart at one with God and comforted by His grace, peace which could write itself upon the walls of catacombs and endure through fiery persecutions, peace which the world could neither give nor take away. How great and good is the portion of men whom He favours! But let it be repeated—here is no favouritism. For the other side of the truth is

The Strain
that was
Lived.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii. this—how happy is the heritage, then or now, of
13, 14. the hearts that are willing to receive !

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAISE

The Song and the Echoes

(i.)

The Song

Glory to God in the Highest (ii. 14.)

(ii.)

The Echoes

He departed to his own house, glorifying God, and they were all amazed and they glorified God (v. 25, 26).

There came a fear on all and they glorified God (vii. 16).

Immediately she was made straight, and glorified God (xiii. 13).

One of them . . . turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God (xvii. 15).

Immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God (xviii. 43).

When the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God (xxiii. 47).

VI

THE SYMPHONY OF WELCOME: NUNC DIMITTIS

"And [Simeon] said, Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."—LUKE ii. 28-35.

THERE is a peculiar beauty in this picture of the Luke ii. Infant Christ welcomed to the arms and hearts 28-35. of aged saints. Simeon and Anna waited long to Holy Babe see their hearts' desire, and now with the coming and Aged Saints. of the Holy Child their lives are crowned and their hopes brought to fruition. Occasionally one comes across unfinished works of art—paintings, sculptures, poems, stories planned by great masters but never completed. The world itself is in a curiously unfinished condition:

"Why is all around us here
As if some lesser god had made the world
But had not force to shape it as he would,

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
28-35.

Till the High God behold it from beyond
And enter it and make it beautiful ? ”

And indeed the Church of Christ itself is in some sense a collection of unfinished masterpieces. The saints are only saints in the making : it doth not yet appear what they shall be ; and those who are farthest advanced on the way to sainthood feel most deeply their imperfection, and are most importunate in their demand for their own completeness. In Simeon and Anna we see two souls who have almost passed beyond that discipline. Life can give them nothing more since it has given them the best, and they go down into the dust of death satisfied with favour and full of the goodness of the Lord. Let Simeon speak for both, “ Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.”

The End
of a Vigil.

The incident has been compared to the famous passage which opens the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. The scene is the roof of Agamemnon’s palace. The time is night. The watchman lies there on his elbow, looking out over the parapet for the gleam of the bonfire which shall signal the fall of Troy. Suddenly the distant beacon shines through the dark. He springs to his feet with the cry :

“ Hail, thou torchbearer of the night, that shedd’st
Light as of morn.”

And he leaps for joy not only of his people’s victory but of his own release from vigil and from strain. So to Simeon and Anna, God’s watchers in the temple, there dawns the light their eyes have longed to see. We are out of the region of un-

The Symphony of Welcome

finished masterpieces now. We see loyal hearts **Luke ii.** crowned at last with loving-kindness and with **28-35.** tender mercy.

Let us keep our eyes on the *Nunc Dimittis* as gathering into itself the devotional value of the passage and it will show us two things at least.

1. It will show us *a soul completed in the vision* **The Persona of salvation.** "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." **Vision.**

If Carlyle's judgment is correct and the degree of vision which dwells in a man is the correct measure of the man, then Simeon greatens visibly while he stands before us. The light in his eyes increases his spiritual stature. From the rank of an unfinished masterpiece he passes into the shining company of those to whom God has put His finishing touch. Simeon had been long a lover of the light. He never belonged to the unclean and self-willed fellowship of Mr Blind-man, Mr Hate-light, and Mrs Bat's-eyes. He had lived for many a year with his windows open towards the east. But now the morning broke for him : what more had he to ask of God or man ?

There is only one way in which we can excel him—that is to anticipate him. It was revealed to him, we are told, that he should not *see death* before he had *seen Christ*. We will ask for ourselves a happier because an earlier gift, not to see *life* before we have seen Christ, not to see *temptation* before we have seen Christ, not to see *trial* before we have seen Christ. And if we see all things in that light, we shall not see in death when it comes anything that can affright us. Having welcomed

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
28-35.

Him in all the wonder of His power and love, there shall come to us, imperfect though we be, and still in the realm of the imperfect, a strange sense of reinforcement. We shall understand what Paul and all the saints have meant when they spoke of being "complete in Him." We shall believe that God means to put us some day among His finished masterpieces, since He has given so great a gift to make us better than we are.

The Vision
of the
Kingdom.

2. And we see too a soul completed in a vision not only of salvation for himself but of *a glory and a radiance for all the world*. "Thy salvation which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." Would not Simeon's life and character have been an unfinished masterpiece still, if his vision had stopped short of this, if he had been content merely to take to his own soul the tidings of comfort and joy and had not spared a thought for God's greater purpose? The world is full of souls that are obviously unfinished because they are self-centred, and the strange thing is that such characters are often found even in the Church, rubbing shoulders with Simeon in the Temple: their conception of salvation begins and ends with themselves, and so long as their own comfort is assured they care not what becomes of the world around them. The kindest thing to say about them is that they are unfinished. God has much work to do upon them yet.

The Cloud
on the
Horizon.

This passage, like all its context, is full of the primitive joy: but the minor chord cannot be

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kept out. There are only three-and-thirty years **Luke ii.**
between the Manger and the Cross, and in this **28-35.**

world the years pass so swiftly we must not be surprised even here to see that Cross casting its shadow before. The day has broken clear in the east, yet in the western sky there are clouds, and who knows how soon they may rush up to darken everything? "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against—yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." It is an instance of Luke's special thoughtfulness for women, and sympathy with them, that this forecast of a Mother's sorrow should find a place in his record. It is a strange mystery that God's clearest Sign should not only speak but should be spoken against; that His elect Stone should turn to be a Stone of Stumbling and a Rock of Offence; that the Prince of Peace should bring a sword whose wounding even loyal and tender hearts may not escape. We can only tremble at the warning, and pray that we may be of those who rise and do not fall.

Two suggestive and interpretative things have happened to the *Nunc Dimittis* in the history of the Church. From very early times it formed a regular part of the service of Vespers and then of Compline, being counted a suitable act of praise for the evening of the day. It was as if believing souls, remembering where Simeon found the completion of his life, wanted to find in the same place the

Some Uses
of the
Song.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
28-35.

completion of every day—the final answer to the day's questions, the final covering to its sins, the final peace for its strivings. Long centuries afterwards, John Knox made it the close and climax of his Communion Service, and the fitness of that is also apparent. Like Simeon, those who come to their Master's table are unfinished souls. They are but the promise of what they shall be. They are "ill content with what they are." And then into the arms of their faith and desire, God lays the Christ of promise, their salvation, their light and their hope. Not Agamemnon's watchman, hailing that far-off victory-fire with leaps of joy; not Simeon in the Temple, hailing his Lord with a song that rings down the ages—should be gladder than they. For they have seen what prophets and kings desired to see, a Saviour Who can bring them beyond their imperfections and set them among the finished works of God.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

To grow old is more difficult than to die.
. . . A resigned and religious old age will often move us more than the heroic ardour of young years. The maturity of the soul is worth more than the first brilliance of its faculties, or the plenitude of its strength, and the eternal in us can but profit from all the ravages made by time.

Henri-Frédéric Amiel

VII

ABOUT TWELVE YEARS OLD

“Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it. But they, supposing Him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found Him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. And when they saw Him, they were amazed: and His mother said unto Him, Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business? And they understood not the saying which He spake unto them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”—LUKE ii. 41-52.

THIS is a passage of quite extraordinary interest. Luke ii. It is our one clear glimpse into the history of the 41-52. hidden years—the one fully written section of the A Window otherwise unwritten story. Further, it contains into the Hidden our Lord's first recorded utterance: until now, Years.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
41-52.

He has been silent so far as the record goes: He is to be silent for eighteen years more until His public ministry begins: but for this moment He breaks silence in our hearing. Yet further, we see things here which are not merely historical but psychological—a glimpse of the working of the mind of Jesus at its formative stage. The mere fact that this passage stands alone, with so many years of silence before it and after it, is worth emphasising. St Luke's claim, in his preface, to be a careful collector of information, is strengthened by his severe reserve in regard to the infancy. The apocryphal Gospels are sufficient evidence of the way in which the Church was ready to invent and to believe fantastic stories about the marvellous Childhood. St Luke avoided that temptation. The presence of the story here may hint the Church's eagerness to know something about the years of growth: the fact that it stands alone bears equal witness to the Evangelist's thorough sifting of his materials, and his determination to give only that which was credible in itself and worthy of the dignity of the Gospel.

A child-
hood
devout—

1. It is perhaps natural on our part first to challenge these priceless verses for anything that they can tell us, directly or by implication, about the life of our Lord in *childhood*—that childhood about which we know so little, about which we should like to know so much. One can gather from the statement that "His parents went up to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover," a fresh

About Twelve Years Old

impression of the devout and disciplined piety **Luke ii.** which made the atmosphere of His upbringing; **41-52.** and if this was His own first visit to Jerusalem and the Temple, we can faintly imagine the eagerness and the gladness of His approach to these storied splendours. The road to Jerusalem for Him, as for those who had gone before Him, was not only the road to the capital city of His race—always fascinating to a provincial—it was the road that led “unto Thy holy hill and to Thy tabernacle,” and thus it was paved with a romance in which history and religion mingled.

There is one thing about His Childhood which we **Yet free** read between the lines rather than in the actual **and joyful.** words: if Joseph and Mary could go for a whole day’s journey homewards without being anxious about Him, His childhood must have been one of remarkable freedom. We may be sure that some mothers who took their boys to Jerusalem would never let them out of sight, not knowing into what mischief they might fall. But here apparently was perfect liberty because there was perfect confidence. Indeed, yet another point may be guessed from the words here employed. “They supposed Him to have been in the company.” “They sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.” His childhood must have been a time of happy comradeship and many friendships. Friendship must often have claimed Him, otherwise anxiety would have entered His Mother’s mind more quickly. So as He grows towards His full stature, He lives no fugitive and cloistered life,

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii.
41-52.

Growth by
Enquiry.

but one in close contact with His fellows in the relationships of common experience.

2. Pressing a little deeper, we see here the mind of our Lord in process of *growth*. Once and again the element of true and natural growth in His history is emphasised. "The Child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom" (v. 40). "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (v. 52). And the story which lies between these two verses is in some measure a commentary upon them. For His growing mind, like every truly growing mind, was an *enquiring* mind. He was found in the midst of a group of Rabbis—probably met together for disputation in some outer court of the Temple—"both hearing them and asking them questions." He *heard* them. It was written long ere this of the Servant of the Lord that He should be a great Listener: "morning by morning He wakeneth mine ear to hear": "the Lord God hath opened mine ear and I was not rebellious" (Is. l. 4). In this story we see a little part of the process by which His ear was opened, Who was to be at once perfect Servant and perfect Son. He also *asked them questions*. What would we not give for a record of the questions He asked? Were they questions which He had brought to His Mother and which she could not answer? Were they questions which were beginning to throng upon His own soul out of the great, perplexing world? Were they questions about His Father's business as these venerable students of the Old Testament

About Twelve Years Old

might be expected to see it, about the documents **Luke ii.** in which that business was fore-shadowed, about **41-52.** the men of God who in their own measure had wrought that business in the by-gone generations, about those parts and aspects of that business which were still waiting to be fulfilled? Who knows? But at least it is clear that His mind grew by enquiry and that He, the King of Truth, being about twelve years old, was already a pilgrim in the path that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

3. Yet we must press deeper still if we are to reach the most fascinating thing in this passage —His sense, already clear, of *His relation to God.* **The Son of the Father.** In this first-recorded utterance of Jesus a new word steals into human speech, or rather an old word used in a new way. If we want a foil to show it forth, we may turn back to the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* and watch the names for God: "*He that is mighty* hath magnified me": "Blessed be *the Lord God of Israel*"—magnificent and melodious names, but they belong to the Old Testament, and the New Testament enters with that simple phrase upon the lips of the Boy Jesus, "*My Father's business.*" Who shall measure the thoughts and feelings that stirred within Him when He uttered the words? What visions of ultimate Reality were here? What foreshadowings of His life task? What sense of something unique in Himself and in His own calling? We can only guess, but already the Son of the Father is shining forth through the eyes and words of the Holy

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ii. Child, and to the end of His day He will find nothing
41-52. dearer than the Father's Name, nothing so urgent
and inexorable as the Father's business.

The Grace After this revelation of His consciousness, it is
of a all the more striking and impressive to read that
Submission. He went down with Joseph and Mary to Nazareth
and "was subject unto them." The grace of the
Lord Jesus, so manifest throughout this Gospel,
is not least apparent here in this quiet and willing
submission. We have guessed at the visions and
dreams which may have been in His heart: yet He
was now a "Son of the Law," and wore the
phylacteries of an allegiance which included the
Fifth Commandment. So

"Supreme Spirit subject was to clay
And Law from its own servants learned a law,
And Light besought a lamp unto its way,
And Awe was reined in awe,
At one small house of Nazareth." ¹

It was the appointed way—the way of submission,
the way, meantime, of limitation. And we who
sometimes fret against our limitations do well to
study Him and learn of Him. The hidden years
enshrine a great lesson for those whose life and
service are quiet and obscure, and who may be
tempted to think that their light is hidden, and
that their task has no place in the Father's plans.
So from the small house at Nazareth there shines
a light to teach us not only lowliness of heart,
but also faith to trust God's wisdom, and patience
to wait His time.

¹ Francis Thompson.

About Twelve Years Old

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke ii.

41-52.

As a stream that runs to sea
Ever by its banks is led,
And by windings shepherded;
So in bonds though bound I be,
I through limits reach to Thee.

Those dear bonds wherein I chafe,
Wishing "Would that I were free!"
These it is which hold me safe,
Bringing me at last to Thee,
As the stream is brought to sea.

Laurence Housman

VIII

THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaïas the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low ; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth ; And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come ? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father : for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees : every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then ? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none ; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do ? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded

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of him, saying, And what shall we do ? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely ; and be content with your wages. And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not ; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water ; but One mightier than I cometh, the latchet of Whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose : He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire : Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and will gather the wheat into His garner ; but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, Added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison."—LUKE iii. 1-20.

ST LUKE appears to write of the opening of the Luke iii. ministry of the Baptist with a sense that the date 1-20. is epoch-making. It is with a curious abundance of detail that he labours here to fix the date by ^{A Man} ^{who made} a Difference. reference to other names well known in history—Tiberius Caesar and the rest. Perhaps he feels a sense of responsibility, in being, as Dr Plummer points out, "the first who tries to fit the Gospel history into the history of the world." There are some points still under dispute, for which the reader may be referred to the critical commentaries, e.g. is the year of Tiberius calculated from his association with Augustus or from the death of the latter ? And who was this Lysanias, whose identification still remains in dispute ? The probabilities are that the ministry of John and our Lord's baptism came about the year 29. But in any case the greatness of John is indirectly conveyed by this extreme care in placing him rightly.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iii. Evidently he was a person who made a difference
1-20. to history.¹

**Great Soul
and Simple
Life.**

There is a lesson in the mere fact that so significant a person steps upon the stage of time so simply, without external aids or trappings of magnificence. He is a child of the desert, not of court or palace. "He reduced living to a minimum," Dr A. B. Davidson says, "but when all the accessories of life, as we usually live it, were removed, the man remained, remained all the greater." Some protest of the Baptist's kind is needed in every age which tends to become worldly, luxurious, "tame in earth's paddock as her prize." The simple life is a sanitary power. People who know how to do without things may be of more use to their day and nation than those who spend lavishly. This is the foremost lesson written across the mission of John—that a man can be great and simple too.

**The Herald
Voice.**

And this man, great though he is, is content to be merely a Voice. St Luke gives the fullest quotation, but all the Synoptics agree in linking the work of John with the great words of Isaiah xl. about the Voice crying in the wilderness: those words and this man seemed made for each other from eternity. To say that John was a Voice is merely to illustrate, under one figure, the fact that he was a Servant. Here that aspect of him is hinted at not only in the quotation but in the whole tone of his reference to One mightier than himself—"the latchet of Whose shoes I am not

¹ Cf. the references in Acts i. 22; x. 37; xiii. 24; in which the mission of John is taken as the start of everything.

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worthy to unloose . . . Whose fan is in His hand, **Luke iii.** and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and He **1-20.** will gather the wheat into His garner"—it is all *His*, and John is but His humble herald. This subordination could not be more absolutely expressed than in the figure of the Voice. And the Voice is content to be a voice, and the Herald a servant, if only all eyes are turned to the splendour of the coming King.

It is very remarkable that one who was so simple, **A Man sent from God.** and withal so humble, should have so deeply stirred the nation. There is a hint of the general interest, and even excitement, in the reference in v. 7 to "the multitude that came forth to be baptised of him" and in v. 15 to a "people in expectation," while "all men mused in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not." And even unlikely classes—despised publicans, rough soldiers—seemed to feel the magic of his influence and to hail him as an authoritative judge upon their problems. Popularity is a notoriously dangerous test of a man's worth and work. It is, however, one thing for a man to be popular with a class, because he panders to the interests of that class, or with a party because he shouts the shibboleths of the party, and it is another and a greater thing to find one whose influence runs through all classes and sections of a people because he stirs the elemental things which belong to all, the common conscience of sin, the common capacity for aspiration. There is more than mere popularity in such a case, and even though a Herod imprison and slay him, his

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iii. work cannot be effaced nor his name blotted out.
i-20. “*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John*”: that is his biography and his vindication.

Prophet and Evangelist. 1. We have a glimpse of John here in two aspects—first *as a prophet*. He is prophetic in spirit and in manner, in that he sees God’s day rushing on, the day that shall burn as an oven, and bids his nation set her house in order ere that day of judgment breaks. It may seem that he is merely minatory in his forecasts of the future, and some have even read the phrase, “He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” as though it were but a vision of the wind and fire of judgment. Yet it is difficult to believe that John did not feel some of the positive and constructive value of such a hope: in so playing the prophet’s part, was he not half or more than half an Evangelist? He had received that baptism himself—without it could he have flamed forth as he did in so dark a day? And his dream was of a nation on fire also for the noblest and best, purged and purified indeed but transfigured too. It was a mighty element in John’s greatness that he saw this possibility. And this desert Voice still speaks with authority, in ages and civilisations which John did not dream of, if he still helps men to realise that they might be greater and better than they are if only they were breathed upon by the Breath of God. We may have our coldness turned to flame; we may have our weakness turned to strength: we may have our innermost being penetrated by Holiness and Power from above.

The Voice in the Wilderness

It is possible to snatch this Gospel even from the **Luke iii.** midst of John's fiery threatenings. Perhaps he **1-20.** knew not the meaning of all he spoke, and Pentecost completes the story.

2. We also see him here as a *moralist*. These **Moral** counsels seem a little cold and limited against **Teacher.** their environment of fiery threatening and promise. Perhaps they need to be completed by some of the "many other things" (v. 18) which St Luke alludes to but does not quote. Even these ethical counsels, however, are of interest as showing the confidence the people had in John, not only as a man of prophetic enthusiasm, but also as a teacher of practical sagacity: they also show John in the rôle of a general adviser, a task to which a prophet does not always condescend. The counsels are brief in their form and immediate in their reference: the people are bidden to be generous, the tax-gatherers to be just, the soldiers to refrain from violence and discontent. Evidently he had a word for every group—plain and pointed and not to be passed on to anyone else. "Every minister ought to preach to his parish, and urge their duty," says Jeremy Taylor: "St John the Baptist told the soldiers what the soldiers should do, but troubled not their heads with what was the duty of the Scribes and Pharisees."¹

It is worth noting that twice in the New **One** Testament we have a multitude asking, "What **Question:** shall we do?" This is the one case: "the people **Two** asked him, saying, What shall we do?" The other **Answers.**

¹ *Rules and Advices to the Clergy*, xv.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iii.
1-20.

case occurs in the story of Pentecost (Acts ii. 37), when the crowd in Jerusalem, pricked to the heart by Peter's preaching, said to him and to the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Is it fair to say that in the one case the answer was an ethic, and in the other a Gospel? Perhaps that would scarcely be just to the Baptist, because, as we have seen, even his ethical counsels are framed in the idea of a Fire-baptism, and he would not have his hearers disjoin even the most pedestrian duty from the doctrine of help from above. But ere the Jerusalem multitude asked their question and Peter answered it, the Cross and the Triumph of Jesus Christ had come, and there was a new element in the situation which transformed everything. Peter said, "Repent and be baptised every one of you *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." It is the entrance of that Name which makes Peter's the greater and deeper reply. It contains within it the final ethic most pure and passionate: and yet it is more than ethic—it is a Gospel in which morality is swallowed up of life.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Our Sin purgation doth require,—
Sometime a Flood of Tears:
Sometime the painful purging Fire
Of Torments, Grievs, or Fears;

The Voice in the Wilderness

And all this Cleansing shall be lost

(When we our best shall do)

Unless we by the Holy Ghost

May be baptised too.

Luke iii.

1-20.

George Wither :

A Hymn whilst we are washing

IX

THE CHRIST OF HUMANITY

“ Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art My beloved Son ; in Thee I am well pleased. And Jesus Himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge, Which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda, Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri, Which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cossam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er, Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim, Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson, Which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda, Which was the son of Jacob, which was

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the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God."—LUKE iii. 21-38.

It was natural that to St Luke, as a Greek, the **Luke iii.** relation of our Lord to the human race should be **21-38.** of even greater interest than His relation to the **Our Lord and the Human Race.** Jews. It is significant that while the first Gospel is liberally sprinkled with references to Old Testament prophecy and the fulfilment of prophetic hopes, in the third Gospel there are only five such quotations; and of these only one is on the Evangelist's own initiative—the others occur in reported speech of our Lord Himself. To St Luke He was the Christ not only of the Jews but of humanity. We may well pause for a moment to consider the wonder of the fact that it should be possible to feel and think thus about Jesus of Nazareth, so comparatively soon after His crucifixion. It was an age of many barriers and prejudices. Jesus was a member of a race small and despised. If the Jew looked down on the Greek from the height of a superior sanctity, the Greek looked down no less on the Jew from the level of a superior culture. Yet this great conception was already working and fruitful, that the person and message of Jesus of Nazareth

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke iii.
21-38.** formed an event of world-wide significance, a possession not for the Jews but for humanity. This emerges in two ways in this section of the Gospel.

**All the
People—
Jesus also.**

1. We feel it in the story of *the Baptism*. St Luke's account of this is compressed, yet even in its compression it is relevant to his main purpose. There is something very characteristic about his way of putting it: "When all the people were baptised . . . Jesus also was baptised." He was in one sense alone, divinely and majestically solitary: the Voice from Heaven is sufficient reminder of that. Yet in another sense He was one of the multitude: He does not sever Himself from "all the people."

**Among
Sinners and
Outsiders.**

To point this out involves no forced interpretation of the passage or of the event. This was indeed the Master's own intention in submitting Himself to the baptism of John—to identify Himself with the human case and lot. The sacrament of baptism was a sacrament for the *penitent*: this explains the Baptist's hesitation, elsewhere recorded, to baptise One so much holier and better than himself. In the act of our Lord there was something vicarious—something dramatic and parabolic. He deliberately took His place that day beside and among the sinful: "When all the people were baptised, Jesus also was baptised." But further, the sacrament of baptism was a sacrament for the *outsider*. The Jew in ordinary times and ordinary moods would never have dreamed of submitting himself to such a rite: it was for proselytes, and

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it says much for the overwhelming force of the **Luke iii.** ministry of John that he brought the Jews to such **21-38.** a mood of penitence that they were willing to take the outsider's place and enter again through the outsider's door into covenant with the God they had disobeyed. To remember this deepens for us the symbolism of Christ's act. He deliberately placed Himself beside the sinners and the outsiders. He took His place with them that He might lead them home.

It is very moving to the heart thus to see our Lord approaching His calling by this path. He identifies His interests and His purpose with those of sinful humanity : He will not stand as far away as He can : He will come as close as He can. And this identification was wrought out consistently through His whole life until at last He completed it in this that He bore our sins in His own body up to the tree. It was a mighty task, but His dedication of Himself to it was answered by a mighty grace. The heavens were opened. The Spirit descended. The radiant fact is told to us in picture words. Perhaps it could not otherwise be told. It means that the vision and the strength needed by Him for His task were given to Him abundantly. They continued with Him to the end. In the power of that Spirit, He began the work which was waiting for Him to do ; and, through the same Eternal Spirit, He, when the evening came, offered Himself without spot unto God, being, last as first, the well-beloved Son in Whom the Father was well-pleased.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iii.
21-38.

The Son
of Adam.

2. The same vision of our Lord, as not for Jews only but for humanity, shows itself also in the *genealogy* which St Luke supplies. For a discussion of the difficulties which arise when this genealogy is compared with that given by St Matthew, the reader may turn to critical commentaries, special treatises and encyclopaedia articles. Here it must be sufficient to notice the Evangelist's main point : that the origins of Jesus go back to the roots of the human race. Matthew is content to write of a son of Abraham, a son of David : Luke runs back to Adam, and behind Adam to that higher Source of Being whence the whole human race derives its original patent of nobility, often so sadly disgraced. Jesus of Nazareth, even if He came of the Jews, was a true human being, and whether we look back to His antecedents or forward to His ultimate destiny, He is the Inter-national, Super-national Christ.

Through
all Sorts.

Genealogies make dry reading. It takes a little tender imagination to read between the words, between the lines, and see the long panorama of the mingled story : the loves, the hates, the sins, the longings, the achievements which are linked with these names. They were not perfect men,—these forerunners of the Perfect Man : the flawless Flower had its roots in the soil. As Dr Parker once said, "He came through all sorts to all sorts." And so He is for all sorts. No soul of any nationality, no soul at any stage of moral and spiritual progress, need be without a home and a welcome in Him.

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So we come back to the Baptism and see afresh **Luke iii.** the fitness of the fact that when all the people were **21-38.** baptised Jesus also was baptised. The Son of **The Second Adam.** Adam was girding Himself to be a Second Adam. It was a great and pregnant hour, and we need not wonder that, as an old writer quaintly puts it, "When Jesus was baptised, the whole Trinity came down to the banks of Jordan." The Father was there, in the voice that proclaimed the Well-beloved Son. The Son was there, to make Himself one with sinful men, one also with the Father's will and purpose of redemption. The Spirit was there, brooding upon the face of the waters as at the first, and preparing a new creation and a new humanity. If we too come to Jordan to see these stupendous things, it is our duty to identify ourselves with the Saviour even as He identified Himself with us. He took hold of our nature and made it His, of our lot and accepted it, of our sin and bore it. And we, emboldened by that infinite grace, are bidden take hold of His obedience and His victory and His Cross and all that is in Him, and say, "It shall all be ours." So it shall be good for us to have been to Jordan and to have seen the Trinity, if we henceforth walk in the footprints of the Son, according to the will of the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

We might have expected that when the work of God was being done, as through the prophetic

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iii.
21-38.

ministry of John, Jesus would be present; but we should have looked for Him at John's side, confronting the people, assisting the prophet to proclaim the word of God. Yet nothing is more true to the character of Jesus and to the spirit in which He carries through His mission than that He appears not at John's side but among the people who came to be baptised; His entrance on His work, like the whole work from beginning to end, was an act of loving communion with us in our misery.

Dr James Denney

X

AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

“And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days He did eat nothing: and when they were ended, He afterward hungered. And the devil said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking Him up into an high mountain, shewed unto Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto Him, All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be Thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind Me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. And he brought Him to Jerusalem, and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee: And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season.”—LUKE iv. 1-13.

It is difficult to know where to make a beginning with a passage so full of the profoundest ethical significance; yet the story supplies us with its **Luke iv. 1-13.**

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke iv.
1-13.
After
Jordan.**

own approach in the phrase that links it with the Baptism. "Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan." Whatever supernatural terrors or splendours hover round, there is something very natural here: after excitement comes reaction; after the consciousness of strength, the testing of that strength in conflict; after self-commitment to a life-long task, the responsibility of choosing the way in which that task shall be attempted. Our Lord is at the parting of the ways, and He has to choose which of the two paths, the world's way or God's, shall carry Him to His goal. Any interpretation fails which does not lead us into the psychological reality that is here: the passage is not a stained glass window, conventional in form and colour: the story was lived, and the life is warm in it still.

**A Chapter
of Auto-
biography.**

It must have been our Lord Himself Who told His disciples the story: it might be labelled a chapter from the autobiography of the Christ. There were three with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration: there were three with Him in the Garden of Sorrow: He was alone in the savage wilderness. He must have told them what He passed through—told them of it in a way strongly pictorial and parabolic as was His wont: we may save ourselves the trouble of finding a mountain high enough to show Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. Quite possibly our Lord's outlook during those days and nights of spiritual struggle was more with the eyes of the spirit than with those of the body. But all the

At the Parting of the Ways

more on that account we are in touch here with **Luke iv.**
an experience most searching and decisive, which **1-13.**
He Himself told in the after days to His disciples,
for their sakes and for ours.

A problem meets us on the threshold and haunts **The**
us all the way through : how could He, the Sinless, **Temptation**
be tempted? A large part of the hold which **of the**
temptation has upon us is that there is weakness **Sinless.**
and treachery within : Diabolus hails the gates
of Mansoul with the full knowledge that he has
allies within who may open Eye-gate and Ear-gate,
or even surrender the key of the castle. But in
Him was no sin—does not the fact reduce the
action here to the level of a painted battle, some
tapestried conflict in which the hero fights but
does not struggle, adventures himself among the
spears but runs no risk of wounds and blood?
The meaning of the temptation of the Sinless
perhaps only the Sinless Himself could fully tell
us. Yet there are one or two things that help
us to understand.

(a) We are not perfect, yet we have our holier **The Peril**
and better moments, and many will testify that **of Exalted**
even these exalted times are by no means immune **Hours.**
from temptation.

“ Not alone in pain and gloom
Does the abhorred tempter come ;
Not in light alone and pleasure
Proffers he the poisoned measure ;
When the soul doth rise
Nearest to its native skies,
There the exalted spirit finds
Borne upon the heavenly winds

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
1-13.

Satan, in an angel's guise
With voice divine and innocent eyes." ¹

These lines are true to psychological and religious experience, and if they record a phase of ourselves, they may also help us to understand our Master.

The Line
of Least
Resistance.

(b) *Even the Holiest is not immune from pleasure and pain.* And pleasure and pain are the great instruments of temptation. We must of course include in the idea of pleasure not merely physical gratification, but the pleasure of power, the joy of influence and prominence, the ease of a life that wins its way without conflict; and in pain we must include not merely bodily suffering but the pain of unpopularity, the pain of a heavy burden and a solitary testimony, the pain of a deferred hope and a delayed kingdom. Perhaps it was because our Lord understood these things so well that He could be tempted, and that He can sympathise with those who are tempted. Might we not put this another way by saying that the essence of temptation for Him, like the essence of temptation for ourselves, lay in the line of least resistance? He saw all round Him in the world the law that moving bodies follow the line of least resistance. The water-courses of the Judean landscape followed that line, turning this way and that according to the yielding of the ground, but always tending downwards. The wild beasts of the desert followed it, obeying their appetites, seeking their pleasures, knowing nothing of voluntary self-denial or self-conquest. And as

¹ Richard Watson Gilder.

At the Parting of the Ways

for the world of men, which He had left for a little **Luke iv.** while at the Spirit's bidding—was not that world **1-13.** following the same track? In their feverish eagerness to seek pleasure and avoid pain, men were like beasts controlled by their appetites, they were like streams running downhill. He saw most clearly that whatever the will of His Father was for Him, it was not that He should follow the line of least resistance: He takes His stand, that we, who otherwise would be defeated and enslaved, may take our stand behind Him.

(c) Every calling has its own temptations, and *the harder and loftier the calling, the more real and tremendous those temptations are likely to be.* **The** ^{**Temptations**} _{**of a**} **Calling.** more radiantly the destiny of any soul shines out, the more certainly comes the pull which drags that soul back and down. And however we define the particular temptations of any prophet or reformer, or of our Lord Himself, do they not all centre in this, that in going out to attack the great law of the life of the world—that moving bodies follow the line of least resistance—and to substitute something better in place of it, they are in danger of being swept off their feet by that law itself and of being swallowed up of its power? We might throw each of our Lord's temptations into the mould of this thought. The first—to let the body have it as against the soul—what is this but to follow the line of least resistance? The second, as Luke ranges them—to compromise with evil and so buy a more speedy victory—this also was to follow the line of least resistance. The third

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
1-13.

—to let the sensational have it as against the spiritual—this again is of the same pattern. And when at last all the three ordeals are over, and the Man Whom God sent stands upright, still clean-handed and clean-hearted in His Father's presence, is not this the glory of His position that He has defied the line of least resistance and all the powers and pomps which tend that way, and has set Himself, with simple, resolute purpose, to follow the will of the Highest?

These general thoughts may help us to follow Him through all His three temptations and to learn from Him in each.

The Body
Speaks.

1. *The weary body* makes its claim, and, fresh from Jordan, He is conscious of His own great powers: yet He follows the line of most resistance in controlling His powers and using them only for others, not to bring ease and comfort to Himself. That decision was not only the victory of a moment: it was the policy of His whole ministry. He never used His powers to save Himself: it is written round His diadem for ever that He saved others—Himself He did not save.

Prudence
Speaks.

2. *The policy of prudence* makes its claim: yet He follows the line of most resistance in defying the suggestion of compromise. Here and at Caesarea Philippi we see how scornful He can be of a worldly wisdom. We sadly compare His unconquerable idealism—if one may use a word far too pale and poor to meet the case—with the frequent worldliness of His Church, the pitiful opportunism even of some of His best servants.

At the Parting of the Ways

The Master is always better than His Church : **Luke iv.**
let those who would find their way through the **I-13.**
snare mark well His footprints !

3. *The impulse of haste* makes its claim : yet He follows the line of most resistance in being willing to wait God's slow time and take the appointed pedestrian way. Canon Streeter¹ thinks that St Luke places this temptation last for a logical reason. If the Kingdom is not to come by worldly means, "it can only be by an act of God such as the Apocalyptists picture. But if so, is the Christ to wait and work, or should He by some startling act precipitate His consummation? . . . Such an attempt to 'force the hand' of God, inconsistent with the trust in the Heavenly Father taught elsewhere, is decisively rejected." Think of the overwhelming impression that might be made—the great Temple and its far-stretching courts for a theatre of display : the thronged multitude, gathered at some high feast from many lands, for an audience to be wrought upon : then Himself, descending upon them as from the skies, held by His Father's power, for a sign and for a portent ! Would not the old prophetic word flash through every mind ?—*the Lord Whom ye seek shall suddenly come to His temple.* And would not men do homage with one heart, convinced in spite of themselves ? The Tempter, someone says, pointed the finger of scorn at "Godhead walking." Yet the pedestrian way was the appointed way : it was His Victory that He was willing to walk. He

Shall
Godhead
Walk ?

¹ *Foundations*, p. 101.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
i-13.

was still of the same mind when He said at a later day: "I must walk to-day and to-morrow and the day following." He kept to His plan though there were no portents from the skies, no magical deliverances wrought upon the earth, to bring the journey to a speedy and easy close. Was He not wise? Is He not so the example and pattern for all the pedestrians of the Royal Highway? It may be a fine thing to leap from pinnacles: it is a finer thing to trudge in the appointed path. It is a great thing to mount up with wings as eagles: it is the greatest of all to walk and not faint.

**A Summary
of a Life.**

It is not difficult to see a straight road running from this wilderness to Calvary: Gethsemane, however distant in miles or years, is but a stone's throw from these experiences. He is learning to love and to fail. He is learning to love as God counts love, the love that is humility, service, self-abnegation, and that was a task which did not unfold all its hardness until the Cross was reached. He is learning to fail, as the world counts failure, in order that He may succeed as God counts success, and that lesson also was not ended until the Cross was borne. These two things are intertwined not only in this passage but in His whole life and ministry. So this story is no mere fragment of the autobiography of our Master: it is His autobiography itself, His earthly experience as He Himself saw its inmost meaning. Here is endless instruction and encouragement for us who are still struggling with our own tendency to follow the line of least resistance. We have seen and

At the Parting of the Ways

felt the downward drift of the world, but we have **Luke iv.** seen a man, God's Man, erect and crowned. We **1-13.** have been in the wilderness with the wild beasts, but we have seen the shining, most clear and steadfast, of the Morning Star.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Stirre up the grace of God that is in thee, and lay hold by faith on eternal life; and count when thou art tempted much yet the end of that temptation will come. And remember that even our dearest Lord could not breake off the tempter in ye middle. But when Sathan had ended *all* the temptation then he departed from Him for a season.

*John Bunyan's Church
to Sister Katherine Hustwhat*

XI

A SERVANT'S PROGRAMME

“ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee : and there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up : and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor ; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son ? And He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto Me this proverb, Physician, heal Thyself : whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Thy country. And He said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land ; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet ; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And

A Servant's Programme

all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, And rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong. But He passing through the midst of them went His way."—LUKE iv. 14-30.

It is difficult to give this passage its proper place **Luke iv.** and sequence in the story of our Lord's ministry. **14-30.**

The incident cannot have come at the very opening **A Frontis-** of His work: the evangelist himself confesses **piece.**

that, by alluding to Christ's previous work in the synagogues of Galilee and to the things which He had done in Capernaum. Probably the story is taken from its exact chronological place and put immediately after the account of the temptation because it makes so perfect a frontispiece to the story of the ministry as a whole. The Evangelists were simple men but they had a good deal of unconscious artistry about them. So this proclamation of grace is taken and finely set in the forefront of a story which means Grace from first to last.

Could the Master have left Nazareth out? There **Holy** He had been brought up. There He had played **Custom.** as a child. There He had worked as a carpenter. There He had worshipped with His people. There in many a quiet hour of prayers and hopes and dreams, He had perfected that fellowship with His Father which made His heart the meeting-place of earth and heaven as no heart had ever been before. It does not surprise us to find Him at Nazareth. But perhaps we are surprised to find Him in the synagogue in pursuance of a habit which He had formed. "He went into the synagogue

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
14-30.

on the Sabbath day as His custom was." Perhaps we are doubly surprised because we have just read that He had "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee." The power of the Spirit and the dominion of custom are very different things: the one might seem to dispense us from the other; and it is a very instructive fact that our Lord saw nothing unnatural in this sequence—having known the power and liberty of the Spirit He did not despise the discipline of custom, the custom of His forefathers which He had made His own. Life is a paradox, and part of the paradox of life is this that it needs grooves as well as wings, rules and customs as well as impulses. So that very Jesus Who had come into Galilee in the power of the Spirit, a winged soul baptised with fire, went into the synagogue, like any common pedestrian, as His custom was. Perhaps we in our turn need to learn that there is nothing, no spiritual endowment, no exceptional experience, no gift of eyes or wings, which can lift us above our need of the steady religious habits which in the by-gone generations have made men wise and holy.

**The Call
of God and
the Past.**

It is possible from this incident to gather some of the thoughts which had been filling our Lord's mind in the opening stages of His ministry. He walked as One Who felt the ordaining touch of the past laid upon Him, the touch of God in the touch of the past. It is evident that Elijah and Elisha were close to His thoughts, prophetic examples and inspirations—men who ran not on

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their own errands but on God's. Carmel, Elijah's **Luke iv.** Carmel, was visible from the slopes on which **14-30.** Nazareth stood: perhaps He had been thinking about God's earlier messengers as He climbed those hills to revisit His home and people. But, above all, the ordaining hands of the Evangelical Prophet were laid upon Him; it was as though, down the corridors of time, God's voice was calling for someone to undertake the loveliest, loftiest mission ever dreamed; and His heart answered, as it had often answered before, "Here am I, send Me." Only this time it was a public call and a public answer. When He had read the old words which described in cadences of perfect beauty the calling of the Servant of the Lord, He said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," and so He made public the silent covenant between His own heart and His Father's Will.

For what shaped this hour, more even than the holy summons of the past, was the tide of love **The Answer of His Soul.** surging up in His own soul. The ancient words would have borne a much less wealthy message if some dry functionary of the Synagogue had read them, who had never in his own soul felt either the world's need of healing or the personal passion for service. Here at last was One Who could say, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me*, and Who knew that it was so by the very passion of pity that was kindled in Him, and by His own longing for service and for sacrifice.

For two things alone, this scene in the Nazareth Synagogue might be for ever notable.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv. 1. One is the entry of a word—the word *Grace*.
14-30. The word is not a new one, but now for the first
Grace enters. time it receives its destined interpretation: “they wondered at the *words of grace* which proceeded out of His mouth.” We cannot help thinking of what this word came to mean to Paul and Augustine and Luther and Bunyan, and to the saints of all lands and times, sinning, suffering, struggling, overcoming; and we seem to gaze here upon the springing of a mountain rill which swells into a river and the river into a lake and the lake into an ocean. It is not in a mere word that grace enters the scene: it fills the picture because Christ fills it, and Christ’s consecration of Himself to the service of the poor and lowly. It is grace that gives Nazareth its opportunity and invitation. It is grace that defies the conventions of Nazareth and preaches a “wideness in God’s mercy like the wideness of the sea.” It is grace that reaches to outsiders neglected and forgotten—to the widows still to be found in Sarepta, and the Naamans that still carry their leprosy upon them. It is grace which reveals itself in the Saviour’s whole constructive programme of a Gospel for the poor, healing for the broken-hearted, sight for the blind, deliverance for the captives. There were great authorities already at work in the world who were prepared to set humanity right by governing it more strictly, by making the prisons larger and the bolts firmer. There were great religions already existing, which were prepared to sanctify human nature by mutilating it, wounding wounded humanity

A Servant's Programme

still more deeply till all desire was dead. But **Luke iv.** here is Grace absolute and positive in this constructive programme which blends healing and liberty together, and so introduces a year of the Lord more acceptable to God and man than any that ever dawned since the earth first went round the sun.

2. Strangely indeed over against such grace there enters *Enmity*, with bitter heart and eyes aflame. It was hard for Him Who was the Incarnation of Grace, to meet with so ungracious a reception—doubly hard that He was wounded in the house of His friends, that He came unto His own and His own received Him not. Yet this also was His calling: He had chosen to love; and he who elects to love elects also to suffer. The worst that was in human nature—jealousy, envy, suspicion, hostility—came out to meet the best that was in Him, and, if it had not been that His hour was not yet come, that day would have brought His ministry to an end. This makes the scene a complete frontispiece to the Ministry of Grace. It is not merely introductory, it is typical. It is like the story of the temptation, a biography in miniature and symbol. The landscape alters and we see across the Samaritan hills to Calvary.

Is the day of this enmity over and past? Dr J. N. Figgis in his book on Nietzsche—that sinister figure, half-mad with egotism, yet able to dominate great spaces of modern thought—warns Christendom that its days of persecution may not

Enmity
meets Grace.

Is the
Conflict
ended?

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
14-30.

be ended. "Nietzsche forces us to face one great fact—hatred. Christian morality is on its trial. More and more will it be openly attacked by those who worship the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Should these elements attain predominance as an ideal, a new outburst of persecution is certain. . . . Nietzsche's philosophy is a repetition of the old complaint that Christians are *hostes humani generis*. His dislike of Christianity is indeed to many people his chief recommendation." But if Nazareth repeats itself, Nazareth will repeat itself in more ways than one. Through new tempests as through ancient enmities, the Master will go on His way : "His grace will to the end brighter and brighter shine." Some day grace will win its perfect victory and the world's enmities will be swallowed up of love.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

I counsel you to think highly of Christ, and of free, free grace, more than ye did before ; for I know that Christ is not known amongst us. I think that I see more of Christ than ever I saw ; and yet I see but little of what may be seen.

Samuel Rutherford

XII

THE MINISTRY OF HEALING

“And [He] came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at His doctrine: for His word was with power. And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, Thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of Him went out into every place of the country round about. And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And He rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that He was Christ. And when it was day, He departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee.”—LUKE iv. 31-44.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv. **THERE** is no question of the historical ground on
31-44. which we stand when we study our Lord's ministry
A Funda- of healing. All our available evidence in regard
mental Fact. to His life and work confirms the fact that there
dwelt in Him a wonderful power which was
continually employed in the healing of men's
bodily and mental ailments: if we know anything
about Him at all, we know that. If anyone
imagines that we are here in the region of myth
—late and lovely dreams spun out of men's fancy
around a notable character, it is sufficient to call
attention to one thing—no such events are recorded
of John the Baptist. He too stirred the nation
and made a deep impression upon the mind of his
time, but there is no attempt whatsoever to link
his name with the wonderful things which are
attributed to Jesus. Here was one part of the
difference between the Herald and his Lord, and
these stories of healing are a part of the original
and fundamental impression made by the Master
upon those, whether they were friends or enemies,
who watched His work.

**Heaven's
own
Crusade.**

In this section of this Gospel, there is given us
a vivid panorama of that ministry and what it
meant to the sufferers of the hour. St Luke, himself
a physician, records it with peculiar interest, and
treatises have been written upon the "medical
language" which he employs here and elsewhere
in the narrative. The story, though it deals with
great wonders, marches with a curious certainty
from case to case and detail to detail. There is
no mist in the atmosphere, and the Great Physician

The Ministry of Healing

stands out clearly as a living Figure of love and **Luke iv.** power, conducting Heaven's own crusade against **31-44.** the forces of suffering and decay, and winning the homage of men's gratitude and praise.

There comes first here the case of a demoniac. **A Soul Invaded.** He had wandered into the Capernaum Synagogue. We hear his wild shriek (v. 34, R.V.) before definite words shape themselves upon his lips. We hear also the Master's sharp, stern response, "Be muzzled and come out," as though He was speaking not to the man himself but to some strange, foul power within. We see the man wallowing on the floor, and suddenly coming to himself amid a stir of astonishment and admiration. It is all extraordinarily vivid, but this whole class of cases in the Gospel records raises certain difficulties for modern minds. It is pointed out that the Jews had in our Lord's day a habit of accounting for diseases, alike of mind and body, by Satanic agency; and it is suggested that in reading these stories considerable allowance may have to be made for the atmosphere and the vocabulary of the day in which they were produced, an atmosphere which our Lord Himself breathed and a vocabulary which He had to speak if He would be understood. The question is a very large one, shading off on the medical side into the psychology of the insane, and running up on the theological side into the meaning and degree of the self-emptying of the Son of God when He became man for our salvation. It is perhaps sufficient here to point out that at the present time there is more to be said for the

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
31-44.

theory of literal "possession" than might have seemed possible a generation ago: they are very modern psychologists who tell us of the possibility of "psychic invasion": we are only beginning to examine our subliminal selves and to realise that these may be not merely underground cellars of a personality but gateways and corridors admitting of approach from spheres unknown. Between psychic invasion and demoniac possession there does not seem very much to pick and choose. But the question, alike in its general aspects and its bearings on the Gospel narrative, is to be settled not by dogmatism but by fuller knowledge.

The Fever
left her.

The next scene is quiet and domestic, hidden from public excitement behind the four walls of a home, where "Simon's wife's mother was holden with a great fever." They tell us that Luke the Physician reveals in that adjective his professional knowledge and interest—the fevers of that day being commonly divided into two classes, the "great" and the "light." Perhaps the same professional interest is revealed in the "immediately" which describes her recovery, so different from the usual slow convalescence accompanied by lingering weakness: the Source of Energy had come to that lowly room and He gave her of Himself. What shall we say to the phrase in which the Evangelist tells us that our Lord "rebuked" the fever? Is it a mere parable, such as we ourselves employ when we speak of the "fight" against disease? Or was He again speaking through the

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mere disease to forces behind and beyond which man can neither measure nor understand ?

Luke iv.

31-44.

An Evening
Throng.

The phrases that follow are very beautiful, as they picture the throng that gathered round Him in the cool of the evening: one seems to see the mute appeal in the eyes of the sufferers, to hear the more audible but not more eloquent pleas of their friends. There is infinite pathos in the scene—human nature is here with all its frailties and torments, physical, mental, spiritual; but Love has come forth to combat human nature's frailties and foes, and a little drama of redemption is compressed into that sunset hour. There is nothing more beautiful or illuminating in the story than this—that "He laid His hands on every one of them." None was lost in the crowd: each felt the individual care of the Great Healer: each must have remembered for the rest of his days that touch which was a recovery, that smile which was a benediction, that inflow of energy from this strong, radiant Personality Who did not count it beneath Him to bear men's sicknesses and infirmities.

The whole healing ministry of Jesus leaves us with a problem: it has been raised at intervals through the ages, not least in our own time. *Has the Church lost a secret which her Master had and which He meant her to possess?* We hear much from many quarters, not all of them Christian, about healing without physical means. Probably there is a residue of genuine cases alike in the wonders of Lourdes and St Anne-de-Beaupré and

Have we
lost the
Secret?

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
31-44.

in those of Christian Science and kindred systems of mental healing. The latter again shade off into the Indian doctrine of Maya. Disease is a part of the great illusion of existence. A man enters a room at night and sees before him what he takes to be a coiled-up snake. He is palsied with terror. But gradually the daylight breaks. He sees that the coiled-up thing is not a snake but a rope. The constriction at his heart ceases. His very physical condition is different. He dismisses his fears and his feelings together. So we human beings are under the dominion of the great illusion. Our fears shape our feelings. When we see reality we shall be well. There are certain elements in common among all these systems. One is the power of the mind over the body. Another is the need of getting the mind into a mood of calm confidence, if order and health are to be brought even into the body. Now at this point we may find our way back to Christ, though we can only touch the margin of His unfathomable working. To Him disease was no illusion but a great and grim reality. Yet the first stage in the mechanism of cure was the establishment of that quiet confidence which meant the possibility of all good. He called it "faith," and one can believe that when He came close to the sick and suffering they felt their cure already begun, because they were in touch with One Who seemed to incarnate in Himself order, strength, and peace.

Others may occasionally appear who have in smaller measure a like gift. But should the Church

The Ministry of Healing

make any wide or systematic effort to revive the **Luke iv.** ministry of healing? One hesitates to assert it, **31-44.** for two reasons. The first, that when she has **The Church and Men's Bodies—** done so she has not been uniformly successful, and there is danger in creating a general expectation which cannot be realised. The second, that as history advances, tasks are specialised, and if we believe God reigns over all wise and loving human effort, we may count Him as truly present in the achievements of scientific medicine and surgery as in the spiritual labours of apostles and evangelists. Meantime there is a region where healing is always direct, and in that sense doubly divine. And dear as men's bodies were to Him their souls were **And Souls.** dearer still, as He passed from place to place preaching the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God.

"They come to Thee, the halt, the maimed, the blind,
The devil-torn, the sick, the sore ;
Thy heart their well of life they find,
Thine ear their open door. . . .

But were I deaf and lame and blind and sore,
I scarce would care for cure to ask ;
Another prayer should haunt Thy door—
Set Thee a harder task.

If Thou art Christ, see here this heart of mine,
Torn, empty, moaning, and unblest !
Had ever heart more need of Thine,
If Thine indeed hath rest ?

Thy word, Thy hand right soon did scare the bane
That in their bodies death did breed ;
If Thou canst cure my deeper pain,
Then Thou art Lord indeed."

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke iv.
31-44.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

I have witnessed tears, death, sorrow, crying, pain. God grant that I may witness the general and particular abolition of all these when death shall at length be swallowed up in victory.

Christina G. Rossetti

XIII

THE BREAKING NETS

“And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. Now when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto Him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him.”—LUKE v. 1-11.

As we make our way to the Lake to watch what is **Luke v.** going to happen, we find ourselves amid the crowd **I-II.** that throngs the shore, and are surprised that it

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke v.
1-11.**

**A Fisher
most
skilful.**

is so large, so dense, so eager. What is the explanation? Is it not that here was a Fisher of Men Who knew His business? How skilful He was! Sometimes He used stories for bait. Sometimes He took a spacious net and flung it wide so that the learned and the simple, the old and the young, were caught by a common interest. But always He reached and touched the profoundest depths of the human spirit, using weights, unseen but felt, which sank His message down till there seemed no hiding-place from the skill of His pursuit. It is well that He should teach His secret to those who come after Him in the same endeavour, for, as things often go, their nets are more likely to be spoiled by unskilful handling than to be broken by the weight of their catch.

**A Teacher
for all
time.**

But this evidently is what He is going to do. "For, when He had left speaking, He said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught." It is not merely fish that He aims at in this command. He had a prize in view fairer than the most silvery scales that ever gleamed among the Galilean waters. For, when the incident was over, He said to Simon, "Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men." Reading the story in the light of these words which close it, we find that Gennesaret refuses to hold it: the Galilean hills refuse to be a background to it: at the bidding of Him Who had faith to remove mountains they haste away: the lake is the world, and the vista is opened into the labour and the harvest of future generations. On

The Breaking Nets

the smaller scale or on the greater, there are two **Luke v.** things here—*failure and success*. **I-II.**

1. It is a story of failure. “Simon said unto **Failure in the Night.** Him, Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing.” That little crew might have toiled through the dark more contentedly had they known that their experience was to be handed down the ages to encourage other fishermen upon a vaster sea. But God’s servants are not told these things at the time: the night is the night, and disappointment is disappointment, and the valley of trouble conceals its door of hope. There is a sense of weariness in the words *all the night*. It had seemed long because of its emptiness: it would have seemed very different if the fish had been approachable and the nets weighty with business. Then the hours would have sped swiftly, and the fishermen would have cried to the horses of the sun to travel slowly and not spoil sport by overleaping too soon the eastern hills. But the hours had dragged because they had been so empty and disappointing: after a night of failure it takes some resolution to fare forth again in the morning upon a new adventure.

Why has that experience been repeated so often **The Sorrow of Empty Nets.** in the history of Christ’s servants, as they have plied their calling on the great sea of human life? Perhaps Simon Peter himself, fisher of men though he was, called and trained by the Master, had his days and years of humiliation and disappointment in the middle of vaster tasks than Gennesaret ever knew. Thomas Boston of Ettrick wrote his

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
1-11.

Soliloquy on the Art of Manfishing out of the heart of just such an experience. "Seeing I am called on to preach the everlasting Gospel, it is my duty to endeavour, and it is my desire to be (Lord, Thou knowest!) a fisher of men. But alas! I may come in with my complaints to my Lord, that I have toiled in some measure but caught nothing, for anything I know as to the conversion of any one soul. I fear I may say, I have almost spent my strength in vain, and my labour for naught, for Israel is not gathered. O my soul, what may be the cause of this? Why does my preaching so little good?" William Chalmers Burns went out as a missionary to China in 1847, after home mission labours of extraordinary fruitfulness. After seven years he wrote these words: "I have laboured in China seven years, and I do not know of a single soul brought to Christ through me." So the Master's servants sometimes toil still through long nights of unrelieved disappointment. But the experience is at least a test: it proves whether they are keen on their fishing. Perhaps some who come to shore in the morning with almost empty nets have more honour in His sight than some whose boats have been quickly and easily filled, for by their perseverance they have proved their loyalty, and others coming after them on the same errand have learned from them how to endure.

Success at
His Word.

2. The story turns from failure to *success*. The turning-point is in the hinge-word "Nevertheless." *Nevertheless*—in spite of the long hours already

The Breaking Nets

spent, in spite of empty nets and disappointed hopes, Luke v. in spite of all the unlikelihoods which a fisherman's I-II. experience cried aloud—"at Thy word I will let down the net." Did the spectators count Peter a good fisherman or not, in being so willing to receive instruction? At any rate, Christ counted him a good disciple, one who might safely be turned into a fisher of men. The days came when Simon and others with him pushed out at the Master's word upon a wider sea. The omens were against them then also. The ministry of Christ Himself had not as a whole been a visible success. He, the great Master of the craft, had finished His work and gone into the unseen, and had gathered in no world-wide harvest: He had left only a little sifted company, which seemed small indeed when the cowards, the traitors, and the temporaries had been picked out of the net and cast away. *Nevertheless!*—that fine loyalty of the disciple heart still held, and at His word they let down the net. And the surprise of the Galilean sea was renewed and excelled in the streets of Jerusalem; "and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

It has often happened so. A few weeks after W. C. Burns wrote the sad words quoted above, he went to a certain town and there a few souls received the message. The hour of the full net was not far away. The few Christians of that town carried the message to their neighbours in another place. "Teacher," they said when they came back, "the people there are very clever at

The Joy
of the
Full Net.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
1-11.

listening: we have preached till we are hoarse and we cannot satisfy them. They come from morning till night to hear the doctrine, and they sit up till midnight and will not go away." It is a glad hour—the hour of the full net. We count Simon Peter happy who had it so quickly after all, alike in Galilee and in later experience. But we may spare a thought for the chastened, yet even more thrilling, happiness of those who have waited longer than Peter waited, and who after many nights of sorrow have come at last to their morning of joy.

*Non nobis,
Domine.*

Yet perhaps it is dangerous to judge the quality of discipleship by the weight of the nets. This passage, in spite of all its encouragements, leaves us with a problem: why, given equal consecration, are there often such different results? Was David Brainerd more whole-hearted than Henry Martyn, the man who said, "Now let me burn out for God"? Yet Brainerd was used to gather many souls, Martyn a few. It may be well then to judge that Simon Peter's greatest success that day on the lake was not in the breaking nets but in the loyalty of the purpose "Nevertheless at Thy word I will let them down." If and when the visible success does come, we shall always know the true servants of the great Master by their humility. They will be found, like Peter, at the feet of their Lord, confessing their unworthiness. The oars that pull home the laden boats ply best to the music of the *Non nobis, Domine*—Not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! But whether success

The Breaking Nets

comes in that form or not, it is open to every true **Luke v.** servant of Christ to have the success of a loyal **I-II.** and trustful obedience. We must ask Him for that grace, that we may not fail Him through any demand of service or any dark night of seeming failure. And when the long hours of fishing are done, and we land upon the far eternal shore to meet Him Whom we have served, we shall not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

If one were not upheld by the spirit of faith to work on without seeing the fruit of one's labours, one would be disheartened, so little does one accomplish, either in winning others or in amending oneself.

Archbishop Fénelon

XIV

THE GOSPEL OF A TOUCH

"And it came to pass, when He was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought Him, saying, Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And He put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And He charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities.

"And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd. And Jesus said, Who touched Me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with Him said, Master, the multitude throng Thee and press Thee, and sayest Thou, Who touched Me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched Me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of Me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before Him, she declared unto Him before all the people for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately. And He said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."

—LUKE v. 12-15; viii. 43-48.

Luke v. **THE** link which binds these two passages together
12-15; is this—that each is the story of a touch. In the
viii. 43-48. first there is the touch of the Master's pity. In

The Gospel of a Touch

the second there is the touch of a woman's faith. **Luke v.**
And in both there is the virtue that heals. **12-15 ;**

1. In the first case, our Lord touched the leper ; **viii. 43-48.**
touched him, though it was breaking the law **The Touch**
to do so ; touched him, though it was against **of Pity.**
all custom and conventionality ; touched him,
though perhaps there was no one else in all the
land who would willingly have done so. To the
leper, this touch was a huge surprise. To Christ,
it was the most natural thing possible. To us,
it is a parable and a Gospel.

Look a little more closely at this pathetic figure. **If Thou**
"A man full of leprosy," says the Evangelist, **wilt, Thou**
with a medical man's interest in a serious case. **canst.**
But the very seriousness of his condition made
him tremendously in earnest. "He fell on his
face, and besought Jesus, saying, Lord, if Thou
wilt, Thou canst make me clean." It is curious
to note that there was no doubt in his mind as
to our Lord's *power*: the might of that radiant
Personality seemed self-evident: the point on
which he needed assurance was Christ's *will*.
There was a reason for this. Leprosy had a sinister
place among diseases. Herodotus tells of the
Persian belief that leprosy came to those who
had "sinned against the sun"; and among the
Jews there was a parallel line of thought connect-
ing leprosy with the curse of God. When Jerome
translated the Old Testament into Latin, and
came to Isaiah liii.—"we held him smitten of
God,"—he used the word *leprosum*: it suggested
someone under the ban both of God and humanity.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v. “If Thou wilt”: it was the pathetic cry of one
12-15; who wondered whether there could be willingness
viii. 43-48. for such as he: it was the articulate fear of a soul
who carried a City of Destruction and a Slough
of Despond in his foul and wretched body, and to
whom the legend over the Wicket Gate seemed
too good to be true. But the Man named Good-
will, who was willing with all His heart to open
the gate, was at this time walking and working
in Galilee; and the touch of His gentle hand was
the leper’s answer.

Sympathy,
Will, and
Power.

The touch was a sign of the Master’s *sympathy*. Sometimes a touch will show sympathy more tenderly than many words. Missionaries in India, in districts where the rules of caste are rigid, tell how hard it is not to touch those whom they have come to love or pity. Our Lord was bound by no rules: His hand was the unfettered servant of His heart. But it was also a sign of His *Will*, and therefore a channel of His *Power*: the health that was in Him went out to conquer the disease: the blessing that was in Him met and annulled the curse. The man was full of leprosy but he was not so full of disease as Christ was full of health. “And immediately”—again the physician in the evangelist records a medical point with eager interest—“his leprosy departed from him.”

Twelve
burdened
Years.

2. We turn to the other story which is almost equal in pathos. “A woman having an issue of blood twelve years.” It is difficult not to make a mental comparison of those twelve years with another twelve years mentioned in an adjacent

The Gospel of a Touch

verse: the little daughter of Jairus was twelve **Luke v.** years old. We compare those twelve years of **12-15;** happy childhood with these twelve years of **viii. 43-48.** burdened and disappointed womanhood. Those twelve years had passed like a day in spring, full of hope and promise—these like a premature autumn, with the leaves of hope withering and winter settling down. The pathos deepens: St Luke uses a word here which is not elsewhere used in the New Testament and which is a vehicle of compact thought. “A woman having an issue of blood twelve years, and having *expended in addition* all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any”: she had not only lost her health, she had in addition lost her means: and hope was being slowly starved to death, when suddenly there crossed her path, how we know not, the rumour of Jesus or the vision of His working.

Timidity sometimes flames into courage, made **The Touch of Faith.** strong by desperate necessity, and it was so in this woman's case. Taking despair by the throat, she came up behind the Master in the crowd, and touched the tassel which was probably drooping from the corner of His robe flung over His shoulder. “And immediately”—again the physician delights to record the amazing speed of the result—“her issue of blood stanchèd.” Some have discussed whether there was not an element of superstition in her faith in the idea that mere contact with Christ's garment could heal her, apart from His personal consent and power. But He is more

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v. merciful than some of His commentators: He
12-15; sees only her faith and holds it up to the light of
viii. 43-48. day: it is that which has conquered Him and won the blessing from Him, and if anything else has mingled with that He lets it die and be forgotten. "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench.

Touching
and
Touching.

Very interesting, psychologically and spiritually, is His question, "Who touched Me?"—not only because it brought the woman to light, as it was intended to do, but also because it led up to the confession of His own consciousness that virtue had gone out of Him. Perhaps it helps us to realise in some small measure the cost at which our Lord's cures were wrought, the drain upon Him of His whole ministry of healing. It was no mere poetry but fact that He bore our sicknesses and took upon Him our infirmities. Perhaps there is no costless Saviourhood in the realm of the body any more than in that of the soul. But the lesson for us is that for our modern world as for that ancient street of curious thronging folk—there is touching and touching: there is the touch that is a mere accidental jostle, and there is a touch that is the prayer of faith and desire. The world that is called Christian may be divided into two classes still; the many who press and the few who touch. There are many who read the Bible, but there is reading and reading,—the reading that skims the literary surface and the

The Gospel of a Touch

reading that penetrates to the spiritual worth. **Luke v.** There are many who say prayers, but there is **12-15**; praying and praying: there is the repetition of **viii. 43-48.** cold words and there is a cry that can send a signal beyond the stars. There is one point, Fénelon says, in which God and the world are agreed—"neither kingdom can be won without taking it by force." This woman is a pattern for God's mighty men: gentle and timid though she be, there was force in her faith that might teach them all how to aim, and how to pray, and how to receive.

It is the tragedy of many lives that they do not **Keep in touch.** *keep in touch.* Once they touched. Once they felt His touch upon them. Now they have wandered away, and all their diseases are upon them again, or perhaps that mortal chill which is the most insidious malady of the soul. There is nothing for it but to take once again the way taken by the leper and by the woman. And when we touch Him, and are touched by Him, let us make it our prayer that we may ever keep in touch. That was not possible in the days of His flesh, for He was subject to the laws of time and space. It is possible now, if our hearts desire it and take pains to secure it. In that unbroken contact there lies all moral and spiritual possibility. We must do our best to keep that contact in repair; and yet we must rely utterly on His grasp of us, which is so much more steady, strong, and faithful than our grasp of Him.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.

12-15 ;

viii. 43-48.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Christ is, always and everywhere, alive to a suppliant's touch. His garment, widespread and dropping low, is near our hand, and He feels a sinner's and a sufferer's touch upon His throne, with circle on circle of glory gathering round Him, and saints and angels thronging in.

Dr John Ker

XV

POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

“And He withdrew Himself into the wilderness, and prayed. And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before Him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. And when He saw their faith, He said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (He said unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.”—LUKE v. 16-26.

WHAT we find in the pages of the Four Evangelists **Luke v.** is not merely the record of certain earthly happen- **16-26.** ings, but the unveiling of a Personality. All the **The Saviour** first three Evangelists record this incident of the **Unveiled.**

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
16-26.

paralytic, and do so with a curiously close resemblance of word and phrase, especially in the sentences which deal with the prerogative of their Master. They evidently count the event as typical and crucial in setting forth who and what He was. He has just returned from one of His brief periods of withdrawal (v. 16) : for a few hours He has left the multitude behind Him, to be alone with His Father and renew His strength. But He is still within earshot of the cry of human need, and soon He is back again where men are waiting for Him with their diseases—and their sins.

Eager
Crowd and
Real Gift.

Before we watch Himself, we may glance at His auditors. There are many of them. He is evidently in an upper room : the house is crowded : even the stairways are blocked : late-comers unless they show some special ingenuity and energy have a poor chance of getting near. There is a strong leaven of criticism, if not of positive hostility : the hard faces and cold eyes of " Pharisees and Doctors of the Law " suggest that the new Teacher is under observation and on His trial. There is a general atmosphere of eagerness, both friendly and hostile, some eager to receive, others eager to find fault. But surely none of the rest were quite so eager as this belated group, carrying the paralytic upon his pallet. Barred from doors and stairs by the crowd, they had the will and they found a way. They had their reasons for being eager. Emerson has a curious passage in one of his essays which might have been written with this incident in mind. He is discussing the

Power to Forgive Sins

type of mob-orator who deals in mere words. "We **Luke v.** see it advertised that Mr Grand will deliver an **16-26.** oration on the Fourth of July, and Mr Hand before the Mechanics Association, and we do not go thither, because we know that these gentlemen will not communicate their own character and experience to the company. If we had reason to expect such a confidence, we should go through all inconvenience and opposition. *The sick would be carried in litters.* But a public oration is an escapade, a non-committal, an apology, a gag, and not a communication, not a speech, not a man." The reason why those friendly bearers of the paralytic were willing to go through so much inconvenience and conquer so many obstacles was that the very opposite of what Emerson describes was happening in this crowded house. The Master was not uttering mere words: He had something real to give both in word and deed: "the power of the Lord was present for Him to heal with" (v. 17).

And now if the auditors be worth watching, much more is He. And in this incident as in many another the unveiling of His personality is the most important thing within the horizon. That is where His signs fit in—they are revelations of Himself. Matthew Arnold said that if he himself could miraculously change his pen into a pen-wiper that would not make what he wrote any the truer; and he thought he had aimed a shrewd blow at the miraculous in Christianity. But Christ's deeds of wonder are not on that poor level: they are unfoldings of Himself and of the divine power

**Signs of
Power and
Love.**

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke v.
16-26.** and love that dwelt in Him : they are a part of the revelation and as such divinely natural, even if from our standpoint super-natural and super-normal.

**Moral
Authority.** 1. Watch the Master then, and hear the supreme Moral Authority speaking in Him. "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." There can be little doubt that here is One Who believes Himself entitled to forgive : He is not merely one of those ministers to whom God has given "power and commandment to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins." The comment of the Scribes and Pharisees, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" may be hostile but it correctly interprets the intention of Christ's utterance. Did He know that the man's sufferings had been caused directly by his sins? Did He see in the man's eyes a hunger for something deeper even than bodily healing? In any case, He addressed Himself to the man's deepest need, without any doubt of His own competence to deal with it. The Mercy Seat, the Judgment Throne, have come into that hushed and astonished room. It is sometimes assumed that the doctrine of our Lord's divinity may be traced to certain elements in the teaching of St Paul or St John. Yet all that they say could scarcely make a more far-reaching or stupendous claim than is implied in this one phrase from the lips of the Son of Man, recorded by all the Synoptics as belonging to this early stage in His ministry.

2. Watch the Master, and see the supreme

Power to Forgive Sins

Spiritual Insight look through His eyes. Two **Luke v. 16-26.** phrases link themselves together. "*He saw their faith*"—the faith of the men who brought the helpless paralytic, perhaps the faith of the invalid and his bearers together: others saw the helplessness, or the persevering energy of those who sought help for that helplessness: He saw the faith. And again, "*When Jesus had perceived their thoughts*"—the thoughts of those who had begun to argue and cavil, perhaps in whispers lest He should hear, perhaps without outward words at all. It was not the only hour in His earthly ministry in which His eyes were as a flame of fire. To be able to see more than one's fellows as one goes through life is not always a comfortable quality: it makes one uncomfortably conscious of hidden sores, smouldering fires, rankling bitter-nesses. And He Who "knew what was in man" had no small load to bear in the mere fact of His insight into what men were thinking and feeling. Yet He had His compensations, for if He "perceived the thoughts" of His enemies and knew how bitter and poisonous they were, He also "saw the faith" in many struggling lives, and He counted it more precious and beautiful than any tangible treasure.

Spiritual
Insight.

3. Watch the Master, and see Him reveal Himself as the supreme Saviour of body and soul together. They thought He had taken the easier way, speaking a brave word about forgiveness, which after all could not be tested or proved. Very well, they should have something their eyes could see, and

Saviour of
Body and
Soul.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
16-26.

then perhaps they would believe in the less visible reality at which they scoffed. So "He said unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thy house. And immediately"—Luke the physician follows the details with interest and, by the way, uses the technical medical term for *paralytic*, not the popular word employed by the other evangelists—"and immediately he rose up before them and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God."

So if some discovered that Christ was an antagonist not to be trifled with, others found Him a glorious Saviour in whom all their needs were met. Not least, the deepest need. Stephen Graham tells of a Russian revolutionary who before his execution turned to the four points of the compass, saying, "Forgive me, North! Forgive me, South! Forgive me, East! Forgive me, West!"—then marched to his doom. There is something ultimate in that need: every other necessity is more or less upon the surface: that one belongs to the very roots of our being. Happy the soul who to whatever point of the compass he looks sees the Face which the paralytic saw when he looked up from his couch in mute appeal. It is the Face of One Who, now as then, is able to forgive all our iniquities and to heal all our diseases, and to redeem our lives from destruction.

Power to Forgive Sins

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke v.
16-26.

If the crowd of difficulties which stand between your soul and God succeed in keeping you away, all is lost. Right into the Presence you must force your way, with no concealment, baring the soul with all its ailments before Him, asking not the arrest of the consequences of sin, but the "cleansing of the conscience from dead works to serve the living God"; so that, if you must suffer, you shall suffer as a forgiven man.

F. W. Robertson

XVI

A GLIMPSE OF TWO FEASTS

“And after these things He went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom : and He said unto him, Follow Me. And he left all, rose up, and followed Him. And Levi made Him a great feast in his own house : and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against His disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners ? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician ; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. . . .

“And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him. And He went into the Pharisee’s house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him : for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell Me therefore, which of them will love him most ? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman ? I entered into thine house, thou

A Glimpse of Two Feasts

gavest Me no water for My feet: but she hath washed My feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest Me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed My feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."—LUKE v. 27-32; vii. 36-50.

It may be well to study these two feasts together, **Luke v.** partly because of the contrast which they make, **27-32**; partly because in all probability, as we shall see, **vii. 36-50.** there was a living link between them.

1. The first of these two gatherings is a *Feast* In Levi's House. *of the Disreputables.* It was given by a disreputable, a tax-gatherer, one who carried about with him the infamy of his detested trade as a hireling of the Roman tyranny. And it was crowded by tax-gatherers "and others," Luke says: Matthew, who was probably Levi himself, says more frankly "tax-gatherers and sinners." Our Lord was indifferent to human verdicts, knowing how partial and external they were bound to be. He had seen a disciple in the tax-gatherer and had called him to follow: and now, with equal defiance of that world and its ways, He came to this feast of sinners.

There were onlookers cold and critical: "the The Scribes and Pharisees murmured." People who Courteous Christ. are not very sure of their own social position are often very nervous about the acquaintances they make and the people they are supposed to "know":

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v. these matters give much less trouble to a real
27-32 ; aristocracy whose place is unassailably secure.
vii. 36-50. So a Pharisee, whose holiness was apt to be somewhat of an external garment, was nervous about contact with social outcasts, and contrived to make himself impressively remote when there was any danger of such a meeting. But the Christ, Whose soul was purity and Whose heart was love, had no such fears and scruples : does the sun fear to smirch itself when it rises upon a fog-laden landscape ? Does the physician fear to lose his dignity when he visits a fever-haunted slum ? Juliana of Norwich meditates much on the courtesy of Jesus. "Flee we to our Lord," she says, "and we shall be comforted : touch we Him and we shall be made clean : cleave we to Him and we shall be secure and safe from all manner of evil. For our courteous Lord willeth that we should be as homely with Him as heart may think or soul may desire. But let us beware that we take not so recklessly this homeliness as to leave courtesy. For our Lord Himself is sovereign homeliness, and as homely as He is, so courteous He is : for He is very courteous." ¹ Great was the joy of those who put that courtesy to the test in Levi's house.

Our Lord's Defence.

The bitter and peevish voices of our Lord's critics were best left in the silence of oblivion, were it not for one thing—they produced the earliest Christian apologetic, our Lord's defence of Himself.²

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 189.

² This was a favourite thought of Dr A. B. Bruce. See his *Galilean Gospel*, etc.

A Glimpse of Two Feasts

Could any defence have been more powerful or more worthy than that which our Lord employed? All the three Synoptics give His glorious utterance because they rightly count it central in the Christian Gospel: "They that are whole need not a physician but they that are sick—I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." In other words—I go to those who need Me, because they need Me! Christianity is a redemptive religion—that is its glory and its best defence. So long as it proves that quality, it stands. If it fails in that, it will die, and no man will shed tears over its grave.

2. The other gathering is a *Feast of the Respectables*. It was held in a Pharisee's house, to which only respectability could have been the admitted passport. It is not the only time we find our Lord in such a house: if He knew no social distinctions downwards, He certainly knew none upwards. There is a curious superstition surviving in Christendom which seems to believe that all the souls who need to be reached by Tract Distributors, District Visitors, and Additional Curates, live in small houses and mean streets. Our Lord gives no countenance to this view. Down or up, to the house of Levi the Publican, or to that of Simon the Pharisee, He will go, because in both He is needed and in both He has His own work to do.

If He thus goes, then, from the roughs to the respectables, surely He will find in the latter place at least charm of manner and delicacy of courtesy? Yet it is not so: in Simon's house there is a chill

In Simon
the
Pharisee's
House.

The Chill in
the Air.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v. in the air which is entirely absent in Levi's: can
27-32; it be that Simon the Pharisee was more intent on
vii. 36-50. exhibiting a Celebrity than on entertaining a Guest? No water for the feet, no kiss of peace, no oil for the anointing! Well—it is possible to have a festival at a very poor board if there is courtesy and kindness, but even a table laden with a feast will not provide a festival if love is driven away. And the strange thing about this second feast is that it required an outsider, a stranger, a sinner, to teach this company these forgotten lessons. The ancient saying is fulfilled: "I will provoke you to jealousy by them which are no people."

How
Festival
began.

What this woman was we know, but who was she? The thought is almost irresistible, now that we have visited Levi's feast, that she was one of the sinners who had met the Great Physician there; and now, out of that environment, she is washed up by the tide of her own emotion into this other, an amazement and an offence to this orthodox and respectable company. But the point is that even in this chill and loveless room, *festival has at last begun*. Here is the courtesy that Simon had not given his Guest—tears for cleansing, and ointment in an alabaster box, and the kiss of penitence for the kiss of welcome. Here in lavish abundance is the hospitality that Simon had given so grudgingly—a heart's whole love accumulated and outpoured. Here is the fellowship which round that grim table had scarcely been possible—the fellowship of the soul and the Saviour, of the Divine Grace and the human need. She

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has had much forgiven; she loves much. Her **Luke v.** faith has saved her. If all things we read in the **27-32**; Gospels are true, the thrill of this feast cannot **vii. 36-50.** be confined to Simon's house: it reaches the skies: there is music round the Throne of God. For the Love that moves the sun in heaven and all the stars is not indifferent to the victory it has won down in this cruel and selfish world.

The parable of the Creditor and his two Debtors, **The Charm of God's Grace.** with which our Lord so happily endeavoured to evangelise the heart of the Pharisee, is self-explanatory; but there is one word in it which our English translation scarcely reproduces, the word that is rendered "frankly forgave." The Greek word contains the word "grace" both in its sound and in its significance: Dr T. R. Glover¹ paraphrases the meaning by saying, "He forgave them the debt with such a charm that they both loved him." The point for us is that here we have a picture of God as our Lord saw Him—forgiving, and forgiving in so charming and gracious a way as to call forth love and gratitude and make His debtors His willing bondsmen for ever. May one reverently say that the Spirit of Truth has increased the charm and beauty of the Gospel of Reconciliation not only by this parable but by the story in which it is set? And our hard hearts are drawn in spite of themselves into the presence of the Redeemer, where we, like this woman before us, are "nothing ashamed of tears upon His feet."

For the lesson of both these incidents is one—

¹ *The Jesus of History*, p. 97.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
27-32;
vii. 36-50.

The
Festival of
the Lowly.

that the Master's chosen festival is always the festival of the lowly. It does not matter whether it be in Levi's house or Simon's, among the outcast or among the orthodox, then or now, it is for the souls who know their need of Him that He reserves His portion and His joy. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* The difference between Levi's feast and Simon's was that in the one case that lesson had been learned, in the other it had not. There was festival even in Simon's house between the Saviour and the one soul that had learned this secret. In God's Kingdom, hunger and need have a key to open the majestic door behind which all light and love are waiting: it is only pride and self-content that doom themselves to the outer darkness.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

When I read this woman's case,
Her love and humble zeal,
I confess, with shame of face,
My heart is made of steel.
Much has been forgiv'n to me,
Jesus paid my heavy score:
What a creature must I be
That I can love no more!

The Olney Hymns

XVII

MORNING JOY

"And they said unto Him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees ; but Thine eat and drink ? And He said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them ? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And He spake also a parable unto them ; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old ; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles ; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles ; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new : for he saith, The old is better."—LUKE v. 33-39.

THERE is something about the tone and colour Luke v. of this passage which is very characteristic of our 33-39. Lord. It occurs in all three Synoptic Gospels, and though there are perplexing differences in the versions, due perhaps to varying interpretations of the symbolism employed, the central meaning is plain enough : it gives us a vivid reflection of the early impression He made and of the early antagonisms stirred by His departure from conventional ways.

1. The first impression made upon us as we read

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v.
33-39.
Radiant
Lives.

is of *the dawning of a great gladness*. Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief? Yes: He was that ere the day was done, but these were as yet the morning hours, and gladness rather than grief seems to have been first associated with His Name. Thus there was an immediate and obvious contrast between Jesus and John. John was an ascetic: his followers were obtrusive in their asceticism—they “fast often”—and systematic in their devotion—they “make prayers,” a curiously rigid phrase: and the Pharisees belonged in this respect at least to the same school. Our Lord and His disciples were leading ordinary lives, unencumbered with such regulations, and yet lives that were not ordinary because they were so radiant with hope.

The
Continuance
of Joy.

There is nothing more wonderful in the New Testament than the continuance of this gladness, in presence of a frowning world and threatening circumstance. It is scarcely too much to say that the only really sad part of the New Testament record is that which begins with Gethsemane and ends with the discovery of the empty tomb. Then came the days of fasting, for the Bridegroom had gone. But the Bridegroom came back. In Acts and the Epistles the springs of joy and peace are flowing sweet and clear. Time cannot make the gladness grow stale. Even persecution, as we see in the Apocalypse, cannot altogether destroy it, though it has now to fight with pain and fear. Even when the Bridegroom, to the world's thinking, was finally away, He was after all still near to the two or three met in His name. We fail too much

Morning Joy

of that gladness—whining, moping, complaining. **Luke v.** Perhaps we fail of the gladness because we fail of **33-39.** the faith and the fellowship. We might join in the confession which Coventry Patmore wrote beneath the Pauline counsel, “Rejoice evermore,”

“I err’d this day, O Lord, and am
Not worthy to be called Thy son ;
But if Thy will be, heavenly Lamb,
That I rejoice,—Thy will be done !”

2. Our Lord, put upon His defence in this matter of the gladness and liberty of His disciples, has His answer ready. There is much compressed thought beneath the figure of the Bridegroom and the wedding guests: the essence of it is that He defends spontaneity in religion. With Him spirit always came first and form second. It would be too much to say that He forbade His disciples to make rules, for some natures need rules; but He wanted them to live on a level above rules, where they would see that rules were not ends but only means. Many of the mistakes of Christendom have come from reversing Christ’s order—from putting form first and spirit second. The “plague of ascetism” in the third Christian century had more affinity with John than with Jesus: the plague of formalism which has cursed many ages has more in it of the cold blood of Pharisaism than of the warm leaping life of Christianity. So when His disciples were censured for their simple and spontaneous gladness, our Lord claimed liberty for the new-born joy to express itself. You cannot,

Spontaneous
Religion.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke v.
33-39.** He said in His vivid way, clothe a wedding party in funeral clothes.

There follow two thoughts which are scarcely wrought out into parables, though they belong to the parable-element in our Lord's teaching.

**Vain Patch-
work.**

The first is the idea of the new patch on the old garment. Had He, in His boyhood's days, seen Mary patching clothes in the poor home at Nazareth? Mark gives the thought a little more elaborately than we find it here, but Luke gives it with sufficient fulness to make plain the idea of patchwork. The old routine of externalism and the new liberty of the spirit would never blend together: the busy-bodies with their needles and their scissors would spend their labour in vain.

**Vain Com-
pression.**

The second is the idea of the new wine in the old wine-skins, hard and dry, and with their elasticity gone. John's scheme of thought and life, Judaism with its way of looking at things—were they big enough, elastic enough, to hold the new wine of the Kingdom? It was obvious that something was seething and swelling now which they could not possibly contain. St Luke as an outsider has a special interest in this point. He is destined to write by and by an historical commentary on the wine and the wine-skins—to tell of Stephen and his large outlook, of Cornelius and how he pressed into the Kingdom, of the mission to the Gentiles transcending all that had been hoped and dreamed. Christianity is so living and so generative that it will certainly expand: if it is not allowed to

Morning Joy

expand by evolution, it will expand by explosion. Luke v. Let it find new forms and methods for itself and fare forth at God's command upon its world-wide mission 33-39.

There is a gracious touch about the last verse of this paragraph. The phrase is peculiar to St Luke: we may be glad that he has preserved it. "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new, for he saith, the old is *good*." ¹ It is worthy of the Master's grace thus to find an excuse for John, and perhaps for others like him, sincere and honest of soul, who cannot "straightway" adjust themselves to new conditions and wholeheartedly accept a new message. They are right to value what they have, for it is good: they need the education of God's patience if they are to move on to what is best. It is the way of reformers and pioneers to deal roughly with those who have gone before them: they are apt to be iconoclasts: they have small patience with those who have a good word for the past and to whom the flavour of the new wine is meantime strange. Our Lord was too wise and gentle to fall into that mistake: He would not have His disciples hard upon the Judaism of their fathers. Yet it remained true that, however good that might be, in Him the Best had come. Men sin against themselves if they make the good the enemy of the best, and it was John himself who said, "He must increase but I must decrease." That Best is ours. We must

The
Master's
Patience
with the
Slow.

¹ R.V. The A.V., with "many ancient authorities," as the R.V. margin puts it, reads "better."

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke v. live into all that He means. And we must not
33-39. forget to open our heart to His joy.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAISE

If a piece of wood became as aware of the nearness of God as an archangel is, the piece of wood would be as happy as an archangel.

Meister Eckhart

I am always happy. . . . Let us fear to leave Him. Let us be always with Him. Let us live and die in His presence.

Brother Lawrence

XVIII

THE SAVIOUR AND THE SABBATH

“ And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that He went through the corn fields ; and His disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days ? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him ; How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him ; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone ? And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath. And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that He entered into the synagogue and taught : and there was a man whose right hand was withered. And the scribes and Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the sabbath day ; that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing ; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil ? to save life, or to destroy it ? And looking round about upon them all, He said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so : and his hand was restored whole as the other. And they were filled with madness ; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.”—LUKE vi. 1-11.

ALL our sources agree in telling us that controversy **Luke vi.** arose at a comparatively early date around the **1-11.** Master's path, and that it was largely occasioned

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.

I-II.

The
Friction of
Progress.

by His attitude to the Sabbath law, as the law was commonly enforced and understood. The new wine was already refusing to be put into the old bottles: the new cloth was showing that it would make but patchwork on the old garment. In a world which is so largely given over to the worship of the god of things-as-they-are it is usually impossible to have progress without friction: friction and strife are part of the price we pay for progress; and that was specially true of our Lord's day, when the religion of the Jews, under the guidance of Scribes and Pharisees, had largely degenerated into a hide-bound system of externalism. Dr Rendel Harris quaintly remarks of the disciples in the cornfields: "They did not know that they were plucking and eating emancipation, that the rubbing of their hands was the type of the whole friction of progress, but Christ knew it." Once more the morning joy of the Bridegroom was clouded by gathering hostilities. "The valleys are covered over with corn: they shout for joy, they also sing"; yet even through so fair an environment perhaps the Master's clear eyes saw a path to Calvary. Were there crimson flowers among the corn to be a parable of sacrifice?

Triviality
and Cruelty.

In such a passage as this the old externalism stands self-condemned. It was obviously waxing old and ready to vanish away. We discover how trivial it could be: "It came to pass on the second sabbath after the first ¹ that He went through the

¹ The Greek word "second-first" here is mysterious. Possibly some copyist wrote "second" with reference to iv. 16; and

The Saviour and the Sabbath

cornfields ; and His disciples plucked the ears of **Luke vi.** corn and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. **I-II.**

And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days ?"—the rubbing being regarded as a kind of threshing and therefore working. And if the externalism of the hour could be on the one hand very trivial, it could be on the other hand very cruel. "There was a man whose right hand was withered ; and the Scribes and Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day." It mattered little that a man should be delivered from misery and helplessness if only their artificial regulations remained unbroken. We scarcely realise how much our Lord did, not only for His own disciples, but for all who should come after, in changing the emphasis from the external to the ethical, the spiritual, the humane : that way lay progress, liberty, and sanity. And the Day of Rest, as seen from His angle, was one of the sanest and most beneficent of God's gifts to men.

Can we see it as He saw it ? Then we shall see it not as a mere statute imposed from without but as a principle running deeply into the nature of things and essentially humane in its intention. Here we no doubt transcend the Old Testament, and yet let us be fair even to the Old Testament. Our Lord's own instance of David and the Shew-

A Humane Principle.

another wrote "first" with reference to vi. 6 ; and afterwards the two words were blended into one. It is omitted by many ancient authorities.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
i-ii.

bread may be taken as a reminder that there was a rational and humane element in the Old Testament practice regarding legal enactments,—the letter of a law sometimes yielding to the claims of necessity and the spirit of mercy. It is true that the Jews have often translated their Sabbath law in a purely negative way, as happens when a Jewish housewife pays a Gentile neighbour to light the fire on the Sabbath, so that she herself may not work in the sacred hours : from that standpoint the Sabbath law is purely negative and arbitrary—thou shalt not do certain things at a certain time. But the Old Testament as a whole gives us a much larger and more generous conception than that : indeed, the way in which the Sabbath law is bound up with the idea of humanity is most noteworthy and deeply impressive. The Deuteronomic form of the Decalogue gives the fourth Commandment in this reasoned form : “ Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it . . . that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou ” (Deut. v. 14). Amos (viii. 5) in his rough handling of the profiteers of his day speaks of their hurry to get the Sabbath over that they may resume their exactions, as though the Sabbath were the poor man’s blessed breathing-space from the pursuit of his oppressors. And another prophetic voice (Isa. lviii.), which is perhaps stricter than any other in enforcing the Sabbath obligation, speaks of it as a day for dealing bread to the hungry and showing hospitality to the poor. Our Lord was, we may be sure, not unmindful of that humane note in the Old Testament

The Saviour and the Sabbath

view of the Sabbath, when He took up His own **Luke vi.** attitude in relation to the burdensome externalism **I-II.** of the day.

For what He did was to continue and develop **Old** that underlying principle. It is difficult to under- **Wisdom:** stand why St Luke leaves out the profoundly **New** suggestive phrase quoted by St Mark : " the Sabbath **Experience.** was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." That is the crystallised essence of the Old Testament position—the spirit of the law as against its mere letter. And when Christ said, as is here recorded, " The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath," He did not mean that an arbitrary dictatorship was being substituted for an arbitrary enactment : He meant that here as always He was the expression of the truth of things—that truth of things into which the Sabbath law sent its roots so deeply down. Now Christianity has something to add to this natural basis for the Day of Rest, but it does not ignore this : on this it builds. And the truth and worth of this become ever more apparent. Sections of human society that have lost their Day of Rest look wistfully at those that have in some measure kept it. The Great War of 1914–1918 was not eight months old when managers of munition works were approaching the Government to ask that seven days' labour might be modified to six, to avoid staleness and secure a steadier output. The ancient wisdom is justified even in the most changed conditions of place and time.

The disciples on that cornfield path, the man with the withered hand in that synagogue of long

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.

1-11.

**The Day
and the
Soul.**

ago, have grown into a great multitude in many nations who have found in the Christian rest-day liberty and healing. We cannot compel others, we who are Christians, but we can do much to create a spirit and to uphold an ideal. A great and happy compulsion is upon our own souls. There is the memory of Christ's resurrection which changed the day from the seventh to the first, and started it upon a new career of beneficence and joy. There is the memory of what this day has meant to our own souls—for worship, for fellowship, for instruction, for repose of body and refreshment of spirit: we say with the great Statesman who declined to take a political engagement on the Day of Rest, "I must keep one day in the week to recall me to what I am and where I am going." And there is the memory of what this day has meant as an opportunity for the teaching of Christian truth and the spread of the Kingdom of God. If Christ used it for healing a withered hand, has not His Church been right in jealously guarding it as her one clear opportunity of getting at men's withered souls, to quicken and energise them? There is a saying of Voltaire, that sceptic with strangely piercing insight: "If you would destroy this Christianity you must first kill Sunday." It is needful that those who believe in Christianity should watch well their attitude and practice in regard to this priceless heritage of weekly rest for men's bodies and opportunity for their souls, lest, in helping to kill Sunday, they help to kill Christianity also.

The Saviour and the Sabbath

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke vi.

I-II.

I am more and more sure by experience that the reason for the observance of the Sabbath lies deep in the everlasting necessities of human nature, and that as long as man is man the blessedness of keeping it not as a day of rest only, but as a day of spiritual rest, will never be annulled.

F. W. Robertson

XIX

THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE

"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles; Simon (whom He also named Peter), and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. And He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of His disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear Him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits; and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all."—LUKE vi. 12-19.

**Luke vi.
12-19.
Elected,
and why.**

THE multitude is within sight even while we study the calling of the Twelve: to set the Twelve against the background of the multitude is to understand something of what is meant by the election of God. The multitude is in two sections by this time. One is hostile: in the previous verses its picture is drawn with a vigorous pen: "They were filled with madness and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus." The

The Calling of the Twelve

other section is eager and wistful: we can see it **Luke vi. 12-19.** in the verses which follow: "A great multitude of people out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, came to hear Him and to be healed." Between these two crowds, the hostile and the eager, stands this little group of twelve, the chosen of the Master. Here are His friends, loving and loved, trusting and trusted—a welcome group for His eye to rest upon when He turns from those fierce and bitter faces. And here too are His servants, and the servants for His sake of the many souls that enquire after Him—elected, as the elect of God have always been from the days of Abraham onwards, not to the exclusion of others but for the sake of others, and for the sake of the Kingdom.

The special feature of interest in St Luke's **A Night of Prayer.** account of this matter is in his definite linking of it with the Master's night of prayer. "He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God; and when it was day He called unto Him His disciples and of them He chose twelve." That vigil reveals the sense of responsibility which weighed upon His heart: it was a night of prayer because it was a night of care. But because it was a night of prayer it was a night of vision too. Now, once again, as on another high mountain, He saw the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them—this time not as a temptation but as an opportunity: He saw the work to be done, and knew that the hour had come for setting apart the men to do it. And the hearts

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
12-19.

of His disciples also lay before Him that night—that illuminated night!—like an open book. He saw their frailties, and their capacities. He called to Him “whom He would,” St Mark says, and the night of prayer had made clear to Him that His choice was in accord with His Father’s will. The calling of this little company may seem a small thing in the proud world’s sight, but let the world wait a little. The counsels of eternity are reaching the Galilean hillsides, and history is being made before our eyes.

St Luke takes us to the heart of the matter in his use of the two words *disciples* and *apostles*.

Learners of
Various
Type.

1. They were Disciples,—already disciples by the time their more special call came to them. There were many other disciples besides themselves, and the variety of that larger company may be guessed at from the variety of type and character which we can discern in this little group. Even in our vision of the group the problem of the individual presents itself, and we have a hint of the varied gifts and qualities bound into one fellowship by the common spirit of discipleship. Here are simple Galilean fishermen for the most part, yet there are one or two at least capable of being trained so as to receive the deepest thoughts of divine revelation and become the teachers of all the ages. Here side by side are Simon the Zealot, the member of a revolutionary party, and Matthew the publican, a man who against all the spirit of Jewish nationalism had set himself to serve the Roman authority. Here are various types of

The Calling of the Twelve

personal character, the many-coloured tempera- Luke vi.
ments of men being prepared for the task of setting 12-19.
forth the many-coloured wisdom of God—Peter
the impulsive, John the meditative, Philip the
cautious, Thomas the melancholy, and others whom
we cannot describe so clearly, each bringing
something of his own. But they were all disciples.
A disciple is one who learns. He is one who receives.
To go on learning and receiving to the end was
one-half of the calling of these men, and it is one-half
of our calling too.

It goes without saying that the problem of the group is Judas Iscariot. Variety we should expect to find, but why such variety as this—the last name, the black name of the list? We may find a partial explanation in the fact that he must at this stage have been at least a disciple: he must have had some desire to learn: he must have had good and great possibilities. And his name stands here to witness to this that divine election is not compulsion: if a man's self-will be strong enough he may break through the meshes of the net of love: on the other hand, even if he end by being among the worst, he at least has his chance of rising to be among the best. For the rest, the problem of Judas must be solved not by us but by those Eternal Counsels which on that night of destiny spoke from beyond the stars. There is a parable¹ about a soul—it might have been Judas or another—who knocked at the door of the house where the Fates were weaving their web, and asked

The Dark
Line in
the Web.

¹ Laura E. Richards, *The Silver Crown*.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi. them for a boon. "Give me back my blunder,"
12-19. he cried, "when I would make a path for Love's
white feet, and set instead a snare for them, to her
hurt." But the shuttle of the Fates went humming
on, and stopped not for his crying. And they
answered: "Even now the shuttle is threaded
with your fault and none may stay its way. Go,
poor soul, empty and crying as you came; yet
take one comfort with you. *Even of this, even of
this, the Web had need.*"

**Messengers
of the
Gospel.**

2. They were further named Apostles. This Greek word, like the Latin word Missionary, means one sent upon an errand. The word had already a certain technical use as a title for men who were sent to collect contributions for the Temple treasury: our Lord took over the word and gave it a new beauty by applying it to the messengers of His evangel: the number twelve, it may be, contained the suggestion that the new Israel was now being formed, and that God was going to call around Himself His own tribes which were scattered abroad. Perhaps the word was very soon chilled and stiffened by human officialism: Paul speaks sarcastically¹ of those who were "Apostles ever-so-much," as though the name had become an irritation to him because of the self-assertiveness with which it was worn. There is nothing of that here in this Galilean atmosphere: the word is in its own place as beautiful as the word disciple: an apostle is a messenger: there is energy in the name, and movement, and the sense of a mission.

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 5—"those precious Apostles" (Moffatt).

The Calling of the Twelve

And without any undue veneration of the saints, Luke vi. we may say that these first Apostles, by their 12-19. position and privilege so near to the Sun of Truth, are like great planets in the firmament of history ; their line is gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.

So these men, called with this double calling, Their
came down from the mountain. And Jesus " came Calling
down with them." The phrase is a Gospel in small and Ours.
bulk. How they must have rejoiced in that presence when they saw the multitude before them—so full of sins, sorrows, diseases, problems ! In the power of that same presence, His servants are able, in their humbler fashion, to be not only His disciples but His messengers still, and they need not envy even those who were first called into that royal service. John Bunyan tells us that in his groping days he brooded long over this story as St Mark gives it, especially the phrase, " He called whom He would." " This Scripture made me faint and fear, yet it kindled fire in my soul. That which made me fear was this—that Christ should have no liking for me, for He called whom He would. But oh ! the glory that I saw in that condition did so engage my heart, that I could seldom read of any that Christ did call, but I presently wished, Would I had been in their clothes ! Would I had been born Peter ! Would I had been born John ! Or, Would I had been by and had heard Him when He called them ! How would I have cried, O Lord, call me also ! But oh, I feared He would not call me ! " Now we

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
12-19.

were not born Peter or John, nor do we wear their clothes, nor were we by when He called them. Yet surely we know Him too well to be burdened by Bunyan's fear. Christ has called us and He does call us. Not Peter, not John was called more clearly. And their calling is in the essence of it our calling—the call to receive and the call to obey.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The heart of any good thing is catholic and expansive. It claims for itself the world. It longs to give itself away, and believes in the capacity of all men to receive it. This noble and true and beautiful truth, whose illustrations are everywhere—was it not declared by Jesus, when out of the choicest heart of the group of His disciples, He selected His Apostles?

Phillips Brooks

XX

A GOSPEL FOR THE POOR

“And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.”—LUKE vi. 20-26.

It is not needful here to argue out one of the difficult Luke vi. problems of New Testament study—the relation 20-26. between St Matthew’s and St Luke’s version of the “Sermon on the Mount.” If we start with the Two Versions of a Sermon. resemblance between the two accounts, we think of one discourse and two reports; if we start rather with the differences, we incline to think of two discourses,—a “Sermon on the Mount” and a “Sermon in the Plain”; and indeed it is conceivable that teaching so succinct, epigrammatic and pictorial as the Master’s may have been repeated, with variations, on many occasions. On the whole

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi. our scholars have meantime abandoned the theory
20-26. of Two Discourses : the resemblance in beginning, middle and end, is too striking to be explained away, but each Evangelist makes his own selection and uses his own emphasis.

God's Poor. It is possible, however, to overstate the differences between St Matthew's version and this. At first sight the divergence is startling. According to the first Gospel, the Master said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," referring to an inward quality : according to the third, He said, "Blessed are ye poor," referring, apparently, to an outward condition. It is this which, along with other ingredients in this Gospel, such as the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, has made some think that St Luke was drawing upon an Ebionite tradition, that his Christian history came to him from a source which found property essentially evil and poverty itself a good. But is St Luke's version so external after all ? As we have seen in studying the holy souls whose portraits are drawn for us in the Gospel of the Infancy, there was a semi-conventional use of words like *poor* and *meek*, which described a certain type in Israel. That type roughly corresponded to a social class and condition, because not many of this world's wealthy and mighty belonged to it ; but its definition was much more spiritual than social. Its atmosphere was that of Psalm xxxiv. : the poor man there, who cried and the Lord heard him, was not necessarily penniless, his poverty was defined along other lines. The God of such souls was the

A Gospel for the Poor

God of Psalm cxxxii., Who said of His Zion, "I Luke vi. will satisfy her poor with bread," not necessarily 20-26. hungry mouths, but rather hungry hearts. To souls of that kind the Beatitudes in St Matthew are addressed, and to them here also is the message and the promise. We must notice the sequence: "He lifted up His eyes *on His disciples*, and said, Blessed are ye poor." They were not all poor in the external sense: some of them were well-to-do fishermen with boats and nets and hired servants. Yet in their case the two ideas of poverty melted into each other—they belonged on the whole to the humbler stratum of society, and they had the contrite heart which hungered after God. So the brothers Hare, in *Guesses at Truth*, wisely say: "At first sight there seems to be a discrepancy between the two statements of the first Beatitude given by St Matthew and by St Luke. But the experience of missionaries in all ages and countries has reconciled them, and has shown that the Kingdom of heaven is indeed the Kingdom both of the poor in spirit and of the poor." These Poor Men of God had, however, three things with which to enrich their souls.

1. One was a *high tradition*. The Master puts them (v. 23) in the line of the prophets. They were indeed in that high line—believing as prophetic souls had believed, hungering as those had hungered, obeying as those had obeyed. If the prophets could have come back from the World of Light to mingle again with the affairs of a low, dark world, where would they have been at home? Among the

In the
Line of
the
Prophets.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
20-26.

Pharisees with their ceremonial observances? At Herod's court, wearing purple and fine linen? Or among these simple and earnest hearts? The question answers itself. So the great world might despise or persecute them; but they might take an honourable pride in their calling—they belonged to the aristocracy of God's Israel.

Under the
Rule of
God.

2. They had, too, a *happy possession*. "Yours is the Kingdom of God." Some scholars have lately been telling us that a more exact translation of this familiar phrase would be "the rule of God." "Kingdom" too much suggests an institution or organisation: what is intended is a vital, personal connection with the Unseen, a life directly ruled from Above, a life directly supplied from Beyond. That was why the Master could say, "The Kingdom is within you": it is not an institution but a spiritual state. "I revere the man who is rich," Emerson says. It is a most Christian utterance. The world's mistake, and our frequent mistake when we fall into worldly ways, is to revere the man who *has* riches: we judge his rank by his baggage. Christ knew where the true wealth lay: these men were beginning to discover that they too knew it and had it.

With their
Crown
before them.

3. And they had also a *coming vindication*. "Ye shall be filled. . . . Ye shall laugh. . . . Your reward is great in heaven." The inward wealth, the immediate heritage, was after all hidden from the eyes of men: therefore the world could despise them and trample upon them in its heavy, stupid way, scarcely knowing what it did. That cannot

A Gospel for the Poor

go on for ever : a great scheme of compensation is **Luke vi.** working itself out to be revealed at last before the **20-26.**

Throne of the Eternal. We could not live and serve to-day unless we believed in some such compensatory scheme. Still less could they in those first perilous days when Christianity was a great adventure. Poor pilgrims of the ideal, they bore the Cross. Rich sons of God, they were promised the Crown.

The Woe; which occupy vv. 24 to 26 are peculiar **The Woe** to St Luke as an ingredient in this discourse. They **of the** are the reverse side of the Beatitudes. We need **Earth-** not understand our Lord as tilting at all tangible **bound.** possessions : He did not ask all His disciples and friends to give up home and property for His sake. Just as "poor" in v. 20 means poor in the sense of Psalm xxxiv., so "rich" here is probably rich in the sense of the *Magnificat*—"the rich He hath sent empty away"—rich in the sense of proud, satisfied, self-content. From the Christian standpoint, what a man possesses, if he has come by it honestly and uses it as a trust, is irrelevant : the demand is for *detachment*, and the rich man's peril lies in this, that it is harder for the man who has much than for the man who has but a modest portion to cultivate the detached spirit. Those who listened to Jesus in the fields were happy in proportion as they were detached. Was there an outer ring of listeners, earth-bound and with no desire for a larger life, to whom He lifted His eyes and spoke these Woes over the heads of His disciples ? His clear eyes saw in the nearer circle those who were willing meantime to bear their Cross, in the

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi. quiet confidence that their Crown would come.
20-26. But in the sullen and selfish faces beyond He saw
the perpetual mistake of humanity—to grasp at
the nearer boons as though they were life's only
crown, forgetting that Time makes dust of them
all, and that the real man requires an infinite
portion.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

My spirit bare before Thee stands ;
I bring no gift, I ask no sign.
I come to Thee with empty hands,
The surer to be filled from Thine.

Dora Greenwell

XXI

A CHALLENGE TO THE EARNEST

“ But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.”—LUKE vi. 27-38.

THE Gospel for the Poor turns now into a Challenge Luke vi. to the Earnest. As among the Beatitudes, so here 27-38. among the ethical counsels, St Luke makes a smaller

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke vi.
27-38.**

**Letter and
Spirit.**

selection than St Matthew, and certain variations are accounted for by the fact that he is writing for Gentiles and not for Jews. Points illustrating the distinction between legal and true righteousness or the relation of Christ to the law of Moses are naturally omitted: the same considerations guide the change of "publicans" and "Gentiles" into the more general "sinners" of v. 34. Here, if in any passage of the New Testament, the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life, and that thought may cast some light on criticism as well as on interpretation.

**Minimum
or
Maximum.**

The various counsels and illustrative instances here might all be gathered round the one challenging question: *If you are in earnest about following the Master, how far are you prepared to go?* Do you want to get off with a minimum, or are you so eager of heart that you will offer the maximum? Let it be noted for the sake of clearness that what is under discussion is the personal duty of the disciple. Social and international problems are not meantime visible. Perhaps the same principles as here emerge may ultimately settle some of those larger problems too: but, as things are, the personal duty is modified when the larger considerations cross the path. For example, I may be justified in turning my own cheek to the smiter,—it is my own; but if it comes to compelling others who may rightly look to me for protection to turn their cheeks to cruel blows, I am outside alike my duty and my right. It must be emphasised that these modifications and complications are

A Challenge to the Earnest

not here considered: the personal duty of the **Luke vi.** Christian disciple, with control over his own life, **27-38.** is alone within view.

We also misread the Master's intention if we think He is giving a code of rules to be literally obeyed. If He gave us rules—ten rules for Christian conduct in place of the Commandments of Sinai, or a hundred in place of ten—how proud we should be when we had kept them all! At that point we should rest on our achievements and conclude that there was no more land to be possessed. What He gives us here is not a set of rules, but a few vivid instances illustrating a general principle. Our popular proverbs are our nearest type of utterance to these gnomic sentences—proverbs which are not interpreted truly if they are applied literally. "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves": if we hoard our pennies but leave our sovereigns lying about, we break the spirit of the proverb in fulfilling its letter. The whole Tolstoyan conception of a literal obedience to the precepts makes that very childish mistake. Indeed it is likely that the Master gives such extreme instances just to make it plain that He is *not* giving rules for conduct, and to deliver us from the bondage of a mechanical and external obedience.

Let it be repeated—this is the principle which is here under illustration: *If we follow the Lord of Love, how far are we prepared to go?* To the minimum or to the maximum? To the conventional goal-post which is fixed not at a very far horizon, **The Infinite Outlook.**

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
27-38.

or past all limits and barriers, as the Law of Love opens up before us its infinite heart? How far are you prepared to go in patience? The instance of the smitten cheek (v. 29) is given to remind us that we may have to go very far. How far are you prepared to go in generosity? The instance of the coat and the cloak (v. 29) is given to deliver us from a cold and calculating prudence. How far are you prepared to go in charity? The great counsel against judging (v. 37) is given, again not to be a rule but to give a vision of the illimitable. If we are going to make it a rule, we must add Albert Bengel's three qualifications: *Sine scientia, sine amore, sine necessitate*: do not judge without knowledge, without love, without necessity: if you know whom and what you are judging, and are delivered from all hate of the person you are judging, and are really called upon to judge, then judge you may and must. But here no such considerations are in sight: this is not a regulation: it is a glimpse of the infinite nature of Christian duty. Go as far as you like along the way of love: then pitch your tent as one that has reached his journey's end—with to-morrow's sunrise you shall see the path still stretching over hill and dale. If any motive is needed, the motive is Christ Himself—Christ Who for us men and for our salvation came not only the one mile¹ to Bethlehem but two miles to the Cross, Who for our sakes laid aside not only the garment of His heavenly

¹ See the illustrative instance in St Matt. v. 41, omitted by St Luke.

A Challenge to the Earnest

glory but also that of His earthly popularity and peace. Luke vi.
27-38.

There is no limit to the claim of Christian duty, yet after all there is a goal at which the faithful pilgrim arrives, "Ye shall be sons of the Most High," ye shall be "merciful even as your Father is merciful." St Luke, who is in love with grace, prefers this to the more general word "perfect" of St Matthew, and it is also characteristic of him that where the first Gospel asks, "What reward have ye?" this third Gospel asks, "What *grace* have ye?" as though the quest were, amid these detailed instances, for the likeness of a gracious God already begun. But if the trend of Christian duty is towards the infinite standards, it is comforting to remember that infinite demands are made in the presence of a grace that is infinite also. If Christ has His way, the Chosen Seed are going to be of great stature when they are fully grown. Why not, if they are nurtured upon the infinite?

There are many problems here for the heart and conscience. Is it possible in a world of competition to carry out even the spirit of the law of love? Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, tells us frankly it is not possible: in a Christian world it is possible to be a Christian: to play the loving part in such a world as this is simply to expose ourselves to ruin. Yet in spite of such verdicts of cynicism and all the unlikelihoods of the case, certain things are plain to open eyes. The world surely needs, for its healing, gentleness, patience, and love. If in

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
27-38.

any case harm is seen to result from love exercised along the lines of gentleness and patience, then love must revise its methods: love's end must ever be the real good of the individual and of the community, not merely the smooth running of the social machine. Yet occasionally we get a glimpse of what love and long-suffering, lavished without stint, can accomplish. Richard Weaver once made a stand in the coal mine against another collier who was attempting to rob him. "Then the collier said, 'I've a good mind to smack thee in thy face.' 'If that will do thee any good,' Weaver replied, 'thou canst do it.' And as he turned his cheek, the other struck him. Richard turned the other cheek, and he struck him again, and again, five times. The sixth time the collier turned from him with a curse. But Weaver prayed, 'Lord forgive him, for Thou knowest I do. Lord save him.'" An altogether foolish idealism? Read the sequel. That was on Saturday. On Monday his antagonist was waiting for him. "The poor fellow burst into weeping, saying, 'Richard, will you forgive me for striking you?' 'I have forgiven thee,' said Weaver, 'ask God to forgive thee. The Lord bless thee.' Richard gave him his hand, and they each went to his work."¹ The way of love has its perils and difficulties, yet we must press on to explore its utmost possibilities. And the Christian spirit patiently applied shall yet make a Christian world.

¹ R. C. Morgan. *Life of Richard Weaver*, p. 36.

A Challenge to the Earnest

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke vi.

27-38.

One wild dream after another . . . beset me and made my blood rush fast and warm. But as the rain fell on us it seemed to wipe them all out with a sponge. "Dreamer," it said to me, "why not try the possible, not the impossible?" And I answered, "I have always hated the possible all my life: I will hate it to the end."

Life and Letters of Stopford Brooke

XXII

THE BUILDING OF A LIFE

“And He spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.”—LUKE vi. 39-49.

Luke vi.
39-49.

In this Evangelist’s version of the Sermon on the Mount there comes an abrupt break after v. 38,

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and a new beginning is made by the phrase, "And He spake a parable unto them." What follows is not one parabolic phrase, but a group of such phrases and counsels, somewhat different from St Matthew's version in order and setting, though culminating, as in the parallel passage, in the parable of the two builders. Perhaps a line of unity may be discerned in the fact that all the sayings here grouped have to do with the "Policy of Thorough" in the spiritual life. From v. 39 to v. 45 the counsels seem mainly intended for those who are to be teachers of the word. From v. 46 to the end the reference is more general: the message is for nominal disciples and all who hear.

1. First the Master seems to focus His gaze on the future Teachers of His truth. They have great need to be thorough, to be thorough with themselves. They must not go forth uninstructed (v. 39), otherwise the blind will lead the blind, and both will fall into the pit. They must not be over-ambitious—did our Lord already begin to discern a strut in the walk of some of His younger messengers?—"the disciple is not above his Master but everyone that is fully educated shall be like his Master": so foolish ambition is put in its place, and a wiser and graver aim is commended. They must not be censorious (v. 41 ff.)—perhaps another besetting sin of youthful apostleship. And here enters the famous conception of the mote and the beam, the splinter and the plank.¹ The very impossibility of taking these

Luke vi.
39-49.

Lessons in
Thorough-
ness.

Teachers of
the Word.

¹ Dr Moffatt's rendering.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke vi.
39-49.**

things in any but a parabolic sense—the language is pictorial to the point of playfulness—casts perhaps a light back upon some of the instances in the middle sections of the sermon, and justifies us in a non-literal interpretation there also. Further, these messengers of Christ must not be neglectful of their own hearts and motives,—this is the essential meaning of the verses (43-45) about the tree and its fruits. He would have them learn that however high a man's office may be, or however conspicuous his learning and talents, his influence will in the ultimate result rise no higher than his own character. So in this group of sentences, the Master was conducting a mission for His own Apostles: they needed it, and all who are called, even in humbler ways, to exercise the same ministry, need it still.

**Office and
Character.**

Illuminated, then, these men are to be—humble, severe in self-scrutiny: in short, their first credential must be their character. A part of the disservice which the mediaeval Church rendered to true religion, and which some who think in the Roman mode are inclined to perpetuate to this day, was in its tendency to exalt office, and official continuity, over character. Now office has its place and its value, and so has continuity; but they who put office first and character second are following a different order and adopting a different emphasis from that of the Master. He did not demand perfection from His disciples all at once, for He knew that even the best of them were only God's growing children; but He did demand a tremendous

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sincerity of motive and aim. John Milton wrote **Luke vi.** in the *Apology for Smectymnus*: "I was confirmed **39-49.** in this opinion that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things must himself be a true poem." We get the essence of our Lord's meaning in these counsels if we paraphrase Milton's words, and say that he who would preach well must himself—in intention and desire at least—be a true sermon. And when office and character go together then we get the ideal messenger of Cowper's poem,¹

"There stands the messenger of truth: there stands
The legate of the skies!—His theme divine,
His office sacred, his credentials clear.
By him the violated law speaks out
Its thunders: and by him, in strains as sweet
As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.
He stablishes the strong, restores the weak,
Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,
And, *arm'd himself in panoply complete*
Of heav'nly temper, furnishes with arms,
Bright as his own, and trains by ev'ry rule
Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
The sacramental host of God's elect!"

It is a great responsibility to be Christ's messenger, and no man called to that service can set down the ideals of it without writing his own condemnation. Yet he knows that he serves a Master Who is as patient and generous as He is holy, and he prays Augustine's prayer, "Give what Thou commandest and then—command what Thou wilt!"

2. From v. 46 to the end the reference seems to **All who hear.**

¹ *The Task*, Book ii.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke vi.
39-49.**

be wider ; it is for all who hear, or who are tempted to say and not to do. St Matthew too has the people who say, " Lord, Lord," and the parable of the builders. There are differences. " That day " does not enter here as clearly as in the parallel passage ; yet it is implied in the parable that the moral life rushes on to a climax in which its character, wise or foolish, deep or shallow, will be revealed. The judgship of Christ is also more prominent in the first Gospel than it is here : yet here too it is implied. " Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? " Who is it that has a right to speak like this ? There are some misguided souls who, being weary of the theology of the Epistles and the Creeds, take refuge in the Sermon on the Mount, under the impression that there they are safe from theology. It is an entire delusion : He Who speaks in this Sermon is One Who holds the uttermost destiny of men in His hand. That is theology. That is Christology. And neither Epistle nor Creed has made for Him any essentially greater claim.

**Words and
Deeds.**

Then as now there were men whose religion ran more to words than to deeds. There was the " Lord, Lord " of mere fluency, from those who wanted something pious to say. There was the " Lord, Lord " of impulse, an easy profession which had never counted the cost. There was the " Lord, Lord " of ambition : it seemed that the Christ was going to be Somebody in the world—it might pay to be in His entourage. There was perhaps then as later the " Lord, Lord " of mere

The Building of a Life

sentiment, a devotion more aesthetic than ethical. **Luke vi.** Browning has pilloried such a character for all 39-49. time in his *Sordello* :

“Song, not deeds,
For we get tired, was chosen.”

Yes—we get tired : that is why songs are easier than service, words than deeds. Our Lord, with merciful severity, keeps close to the practical test, and the conscience of the ages is with Him.

His practical purpose comes to its climax in the **Dig deep.** great parable of the two builders. Again there is a difference from St Matthew, amid the similarity : the first Gospel speaks of the rock and the sand ; here the contrast is rather between digging and not digging—digging to find a foundation on the rock-bottom and not taking the trouble to dig at all. The one man is lazy, and therefore doubly foolish : the other gets to work with pains and perspiration, and is thankful for his own thoroughness when the hour of testing comes. “Rare as epic song,” George Meredith says, “is the man who is thorough in what he does.” Our Lord perhaps felt that when He sketched this parable—a reflection of the life of His day, a warning to His would-be disciples. It must be our aim to be thorough in building upon His words. It will be better still to have Him build in us. A character so built shall outlive granite, and laugh at time.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vi.
39-49.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Simeon Stylites . . . so Theodoret tells us, heard a voice in his sleep which said to him, Arise and dig. He seemed to dig for a time and then ceased, when the voice said to him, Dig deeper! Four times he dug, four times he rested, and four times the voice cried, Dig deeper! After that it said, Now build without toil.

F. W. Faber

XXIII

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

"Now when He had ended all His sayings in the audience of the people, He entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto Him the elders of the Jews, beseeching Him that He would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought Him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom He should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them. And when He was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying unto Him, Lord, trouble not Thyself: for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed Him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."—LUKE vii. 1-10.

THE revelation of the Saving Personality, which Luke vii. is the chief interest of the Gospel narrative, proceeds 1-10. apace. We have already seen Him once and again ^{The} in contact with the sick, healing them, as it seemed, ^{Conquest of} by the might of the health that was in Him. We ^{Distance.} shall see Him immediately in like manner giving

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii. life to the dead. But for the moment we are at
1-10. an intermediate wonder, and watch Him exercising His healing ministry without even the opportunity of contact, healing at a distance, healing with a word. Is it too wonderful to be credible? It all depends on the view we take of Him. Teletherapy may have been as natural to Him as telephony, telegraphy, or telepathy has become to us. If He came from the creative side of reality, is it surprising that He should have had secret access of His own to the lives that needed Him, or that He should be able to ride along the track of some fourth dimension which defied the normal conditions of time and space? We know Him well enough by this time to know that He worked along the lines of faith; and if faith could leap distance to clasp His feet, had not His help the power of return by the same unmapped path?

**Good
Centurions.**

In the New Testament a centurion is for some reason almost a synonym for a genial and open-hearted type of character. It was a centurion who, beside the Cross, glorified God and said, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (St Luke xxiii. 47). It was Cornelius the centurion of whom it was said that he was "a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews" (Acts x. 22). It was a centurion who at Jerusalem, when Paul was arrested, warned the chief captain and said, "Take heed what thou doest, for this man is a Roman" (Acts xxii. 26). It was a centurion on the voyage to Rome who, "willing to save Paul," kept the soldiers from their

The Centurion's Servant

purpose of killing the prisoners (Acts xxvii. 43). **Luke vii.**
One wonders at this uniformly favourable portraiture, **1-10.**
and guesses that perhaps the imperial service
attracted a fine type of man, chastened him by
discipline, and by its world-outlook helped to set
him free from narrow fanaticisms. Here in this
Capernaum scene the portrait of the centurion
is again most attractive. He is attached to his
sick slave, and eager for the lad's recovery. He
has the good testimony of his Jewish neighbours.
He has evidently treated them courteously and even
munificently: "he loveth our nation and he hath
built us a synagogue." They sum up their tribute
in the phrase, "He is worthy," and no private man
or public servant need covet a finer certificate.

The eyes of the Master recognised another quality **Worth and**
still which He could not let pass without His praise. **Modesty.**
But we may pause to contrast for a moment the
"He is worthy" of the neighbours with the "I
am not worthy" which the centurion uttered
regarding himself. Even if he be a pagan and an
outsider, he is in this at least a true child of that
Israel who said, "I am not worthy of the least of
all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou
hast showed unto Thy servant" (Gen. xxxii. 10).
He is a relative of that Duke of Candia of whom
Jeremy Taylor quaintly tells, who for the sake of
the kingdom of heaven lived a life of poverty and
toil. A friend advised him to take better care of
himself, and allow himself more comforts and
pleasures. "Sir," said the Duke, "do not think
I am ill provided, for I send a messenger before,

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii.
1-10.

who makes my lodgings ready, and takes care that I am royally entertained." "Who is the messenger?" asked his friend. "It is the knowledge of myself," he answered, "and the consideration of what I have deserved for my sins. When with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however poor I find it, I think it is better than I deserve." When we think of the many who brag and bluster, and the many also who have a complaint against life because it has never given them what they think they deserve, there is something very fragrant in this "I am not worthy" of the centurion's modest and humble spirit. True and generous character will always, sooner or later, win the certificate of worthiness from its environment; yet it will receive that with a certain touch of surprise, and will not be forgetful of its own shortcomings even in the hour of popularity and praise.

A Soul
awake.

Yet though he said, "I am not worthy," there was no droop in the wings of his faith, and when his heart was so full of eager desire, not even his sense of unworthiness was allowed to retard his request. In such a character lowliness and boldness meet, and faith draws them both into itself. There is a curious and unresolved discrepancy between St Matthew's narrative which makes the centurion come himself, and St Luke's which describes him as sending friends and neighbours. But the very difference makes more striking the identity of the two accounts of his ingenious argument. "Speak with a word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under

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me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth ; Luke vii. and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to my 1-10. servant, Do this and he doeth it." Dr A. B. Bruce, in commenting upon three outstanding instances of faith—those of the Syro-phœnician woman, the Woman that was a Sinner, and this Centurion—remarks that we may learn from these narratives something about the psychology of faith as conceived by Jesus.¹ "Those whom He accounted great in faith were likely to be interesting people, in all respects far from commonplace either intellectually or morally." That is true, and the centurion is a good illustration of it. Faith is not a separate faculty disjoined from the rest of a man or even contradictory to some of his other faculties. Faith is a soul awake, and no sleepy soul could have spoken those words of v. 8, which so stirred the admiration of the Master. The centurion thinks in army language ; yet, though he does not know it, he is really turning into a Christian theologian. He has insight to see in Christ the Superior Officer in the campaign of life against death ; and, accustomed as he himself is both to giving and receiving orders which must be obeyed, he believes that Christ has words which turns themselves into deeds, and commands which distance cannot weaken nor disease defy. And it was so, for, though no dispatch-rider galloped to the centurion's house and no winged courier outstripped the breeze, "they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick."

¹ *The Kingdom of God*, p. 100 f.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii.

1-10.

What is
Faith ?

What, in its plainest definition, was that Faith which the Master here found so abundantly and praised so highly ? We cannot better Dr James Denney's description of it : " It is that attitude of the soul which is confident that the saving help of God is present in Him, and that there is no limit to what it can do." ¹ It was to the Master a great surprise and a constant grief that in Israel, prepared and trained, He had found so little of this : but it was a consolation and a joy when He suddenly came upon it in the life of an outsider. All that was in Him went out to meet it and to answer it. And when He finds it still, time and distance again are conquered : He still answers it with His grace and crowns it with His praise. Lord, increase our faith !

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

What discipline is to a soldier, faith is to a Christian. A religious man is a man who is under authority. He goes to his commander and gets orders for the day. . . . He says to his passions, Go ; and to his virtues, Come ; and to his duty, Do this ; and the whole little company of his own ambitions and desires fall into line behind him, because he is himself a man under authority. That is a soldier's discipline, and that is a Christian's faith.

Francis Greenwood Peabody

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 254.

XXIV

THE LORD OF LIFE

“And it came to pass the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited His people. And this rumour of Him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about. . . .

“And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received Him: for they were all waiting for Him. And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue: and he fell down at Jesus’ feet, and besought Him that He would come into his house: For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him. . . . While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole. And when He came into the house, He suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but He said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And

St Luke i.—xi.

they laughed Him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And He put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and He commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished: but He charged them that they should tell no man what was done."—LUKE vii. 11-17; viii. 40-42, 49-56.

Luke vii.
11-17;
viii. 40-
42, 49-56.
The bleak
Fact of
Death.

THE chief fascination of the story is still the Revelation of a Personality. We have seen Him conquering Disease and Distance: the supreme test meets Him when He comes face to face with Death. He could not avoid such an encounter sooner or later. Donne in one of his funeral elegies has a fine phrase about death: he says death is the sea which environs us all, and though God has set marks and bounds to it, yet we can for ever hear it roar and gnaw upon our shores. What wonder then if our Lord, as He walked about the world, came occasionally into touch with this bleak fact? There is a famous story of a young Indian mother whose child died. She went to the Buddha for medicine that would bring it to life. The Buddha told her to get mustard seed from some house where no son, or husband, or parent, or friend had ever died. She went on her quest, but found it vain. When she returned, the Buddha said to her, "Have you the mustard seed?" "My Lord, I have not," she said: "the living are few but the dead are many."

Has the Master indeed brought with Him some seed of life from a deathless land? It looks as though He had. In His age, as in every other, the dead were many, and often those who seemed

The Lord of Life

most needed were taken away. Let us link these **Luke vii.** two passages together because they reveal the **11-17**; one Lord of Life and Power. Each in its own **viii. 40-** way is extraordinarily vivid, and yet brief and **42, 49-56.** restrained, as though the Evangelist were determined to keep close to the facts and not to give way either to sentiment or superstition.

1. We watch Him going into Nain. A crowd is **The Crowds** with Him—partly, no doubt, His disciples, partly **at Nain.** curiosity-mongers hoping to see strange cures, partly perhaps indifferent wayfarers, who are travelling that way in any case and may as well travel in company. Suddenly, at the city gate, a crowd emerges and meets the entering crowd: it is a crowd of mourners, and one of them is a mourner indeed, for the dead man is the only son of his mother and she is a widow. The case is so sad and so much talked about that the little town gives a great funeral: "much people of the city was with her." But when the two crowds meet the whole scene groups itself round Christ: He Who is the Resurrection and the Life has come to Nain.

How far will His writ run? Evidently He expects it to run as far as this mother's unfathomable grief: "He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not." Evidently He expects it to run as far as the control of this whole occasion, until every gaze around must have been riveted, and every heart pulsing with amazement: "He came and touched the bier, and they that bare it stood still." Yet these are smaller things: the great

**The Writ
that runs
far.**

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii. thing comes. Evidently He expects His writ to
11-17 ; run along a track which no mortal eye can see,
viii. 40- but which sooner or later every immortal soul
42, 49-56. must take—the track that pierces the veil and
leads to realms unseen. For He said, “Young
man, I say unto thee, Arise.” “And he that was
dead sat up, and began to speak.” The story
would not be complete without the tender touch
that follows, “And He delivered him to his mother.”
Thus He Who had first addressed Himself to a
mother’s unfathomable grief had proved His right
to do so, since He was able to turn her mourning
into unfathomable joy.

Another
only Child.

2. Let us turn now to the other story : the same
restrained vividness is characteristic of it. It has
again the pathos and the tragedy of the case of
an only child. One can hear the urgency of the
father’s footsteps as he hurries to seek the Master :
one can see the entreaty of his attitude as he falls
at the Great Healer’s feet : though nothing is
said about it in the story, one can feel between the
lines his impatience at their slow, interrupted
progress, and the chill that settles down upon his
soul when the message meets them, “Thy daughter
is dead.” And when at last they reach the
stricken home, how great is the contrast between
the noise and excitement of the assembled company,
and the quiet approach of the Master Who seems
so strangely sure of Himself and of what God will
do through Him !

He went on. For again the central question here is : How
far will His writ run ? “Every other human being

The Lord of Life

in history," says Dr David Cairns,¹ "when he **Luke vii.** heard that fatal word, *death*, would have turned **ii-17;** and gone back. Jesus went on. . . . What a **viii. 40-** sense of God He must have had, of the reality **42, 49-56.** and power and the love of God, and of the liberty of that God to help Him! It is as unique as the deed that is recorded to have followed on that going on, and it is the whole theory of the Gospel narratives that the one uniqueness explains the other." Yes, He had brought with Him from the deathless land a marvellous mustard-seed—a faith in a Father of power and love, Whose power and love were all at His disposal for the tasks that called Him; and His writ runs far because God's writ runs through His. Sure of Himself, and of the Father Whose works He has come to do, He is beautiful alike in His severity and in His tenderness. "They laughed Him to scorn": as far back as Cyril of Alexandria, commentators were beginning to see the apologetic value of that laughter. By their laughter, Cyril says, "they gave a clear and adequate acknowledgment that the damsel was dead." He put them all out—those noisy, scornful folk. And He took her by the hand, and said, "Little Girl, get up." And the tender thoughtfulness with which He told them to give her food is the parallel here to the final touch of tenderness in the story of Nain, when He delivered the young man to his mother. If in this case He asks the parents not to talk about the case, it may be for their own sakes, lest they

¹ *The Reasonableness of the Christian Faith*, p. 118.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii. should spend their strength in idle gossip. He
11-17; has repaired the broken circle of their home: it
viii. 40- is best that life should go on again, without fuss
42, 49-56. and without distraction.

The Problems.

Such cases leave problems behind them. There is the perpetual problem of election: there must have been many other bereavements in Israel: why and on what principle were these cases—these two and that of Lazarus—selected for the revelation of the Master's power? And there is the even deeper problem of the dubious benefit to those who thus are called back. Even if we are not as pessimistic as Queen Elizabeth when she said, "I count them happiest that go hence soonest," we might well say that, having once passed the portal, we would count it poor fortune to be recalled and made to confront a second time either the battle of life or the struggle of death. We can only leave these problems at His feet: He is too loving and too wise to make mistakes; and as for these individual cases, the widow and her only son, Jairus and his only daughter, it is not they who raise the difficulties; we leave them in an atmosphere of gratitude and joy.

The Certainty.

For ourselves the permanent message is this, that *His writ runs on the other side*. Here as through all the story the supreme thing is not the mere detail of the incident but the Personality unveiled: we know better, because of these things, Who and What He is. Dean Inge¹ calls attention to the fact that when our Lord is about to raise Lazarus

¹ Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i., p. 894.

The Lord of Life

from the dead "He does not invite attention to Luke vii. what He is about to do, but to His own Person, 11-17 ; 'I am the Resurrection and Life.'" "The deep viii. 40-significance of this is often missed," he adds. "If 42, 49-56. the words referred only to the approaching miracle, they would convey but hollow comfort to the Christian mourner, for whom no miracles are wrought. . . . The words bid us concentrate our thoughts upon the Person of Christ. 'He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die.'" It is the same Person Whom we see at the gate of Nain and in the house of Jairus. His writ runs far. And when we too have crossed this island of our human life and come to the bleak sea of death that roars and gnaws upon our shores, we shall find Him adequate to our mortal need, the Lord of Life and Power, the Saviour from Whose pursuing tenderness not even death can separate.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

One cometh on the wings
Of morn, to Him the darkness is as light ;
He seeks my soul ; He saves it from the Kings
Of Hades and of Night.

He cometh, o'er my woes
A Victor, purple in His garment's stain,
Red with the life-blood of His conquered foes
And mine,—death, sin, and pain.

Dora Greenwell

XXV

THE BAPTIST AND THE CHRIST

“And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art Thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto Him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto Thee, saying, Art Thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind He gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me. And when the messengers of John were departed, He began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is He, of whom it is written, Behold, I send My messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he. And all the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then

The Baptist and the Christ

shall I liken the men of this generation ? and to what are they like ? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced : we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept. For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine ; and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of man is come eating and drinking ; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners ! But wisdom is justified of all her children.”—LUKE vii. 18-35.

It is one of the surprises of the Gospels that we Luke vii. should find the mind of John the Baptist, himself 18-35. the herald of the day, apparently clouded for a time by a great darkness. Hence there are attempts Under the Juniper Tree. to explain away the question which he sent : “ Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another ? ” Perhaps he made the enquiry not on his own behalf, but on account of some of his disciples who were in a doubting mood. But the attempt to set the Baptist free from the responsibility of his own question has a touch of unreality about it, and the answer was sent straight to John—“ Go your way and tell John ”—as if the Master were sure that the question had come straight from John’s heart. “ The soul has its fainting fits,” that is the deeper and the likelier explanation. The soul of Elijah had its fainting fits : why not the soul of Elijah the Second ? The soul of Peter had its moments of cowardice and the soul of Luther its hours of despair : there is nothing improbable in the idea that the soul of Christ’s forerunner had its time of impatience or even of great perplexity.

1. *The mist settles.* They tell us that when the

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii.
18-35.
The Shadow
of Giant
Despair.

Black Death went on its terrible career through Europe, its advance was often accompanied by a pale blue mist, probably the product of undrained lands, carrying with it the germs of infection. So, sometimes, out of the soil or out of the atmosphere, or out of the abysmal deeps within, there come fogs that bring fainting, or worse than fainting, to the soul. How did it happen in the Baptist's case? It is impossible to explore all the physical and psychological possibilities of life in Herod's dungeon, bodily reaction after long strain, possibly emotional disappointment because the promised Judge of men did not seem to be making swift progress with the axe and the unquenchable fire. But there was one element in the case which quite probably sharpened these thoughts and feelings to an edge of keenest pain. John was in prison when he heard of the works of the Christ, the Christ Who seemed to have plenty of love and power for other men, but Who seemed to have abandoned His own forerunner and left him to his fate. Kings had their favourites: Herod had servants for whom he would no doubt open any dungeon door or work any wonders that wealth and power could accomplish. Would not the Christ of God do as much for His own loyal servant? So the prisoner sat and brooded in the darkness, and beside him in the murk of Herod's prison sat another whose presence John found it hard to flee—his name was Giant Despair.

It is very difficult to keep a straight line in a

The Baptist and the Christ

fog. When a man thinks he is steering straight, Luke vii. he is as likely as not to be bending round upon his 18-35. track and reapproaching his starting point. Now A Straight Path. let it be set down to John's honour and credit that even in a fog he steered straight. He had preached that men should make straight paths for their feet. Here he put his own teaching into practice: he sent his question straight to Christ and prepared a straight path for a straight answer. What better can any man do with his perplexities? The best thing to do with doubts is to turn them into prayers. "I conquered my doubts," says Sir Thomas Browne, "upon my knees."

2. *The Sun shines through.* For our Lord honoured with a straight and immediate answer the straight path which John had made. He sent *words* to him, ancient and lovely words, perhaps the very choice of these was itself a lesson and a message. John had dwelt too exclusively on warnings and threatenings: Christ bade him read his Old Testament again and emphasise it a little differently. It was with promises, welcomes, and invitations that the Son of God found His own affinity: judgment was God's last resort. But still more significant was the fact that the words sent were a *selection*. It justifies the above guess as to the precise thought which was in John's mind if we notice that while Christ quoted the great passage about the Anointed Servant, He did not send John the whole passage. He gave him "the eyes of the blind shall be opened," and "the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped,"

Old Words,
and a new
Message.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii.
18-35.

and "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to preach good tidings unto the meek." But He apparently omitted the proclamation of liberty to the captives, and put in instead, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me." One wonders how John received the message. One would like to feel that he received it believingly, and that his lonely cell was filled with comfort as he realised that, whatever might happen to the individual worker, the promises of God were being mightily fulfilled.

A Purge
for
Wilfulness.

The passage is God's purge for wilfulness—that wilfulness of the saints which is sometimes almost as troublesome as the wilfulness of sinners. John has his hopes, his wishes, his bitter disappointments ; in perfect love and wisdom, with perfect decisiveness, the Christ takes His own way. We too have our impatient hopes, our imperious wishes, our petulant complaints, and still, with majestic feet, undistracted and unswerving, the Providence and Grace of God take their own way. Blessed are we if we are not offended in Him : it is better and happier to trust than to rebel. If we try to change His plans or to hasten His pace we are sure to be disappointed.

"O Son of God, to right my lot
Nought but Thy presence can avail :
Yet on the road Thy wheels are not
Nor on the sea Thy sail."

But if we ask Him to change ourselves, that we may harmonise with His will, nothing is impossible :

The Baptist and the Christ

"My *how* or *when* Thou wilt not heed
But come down Thine own secret stair,
And Thou wilt answer every need
Yea! every by-gone prayer."¹

Luke vii.
18-35.

We have already seen our Lord eagerly speaking a good word for John, lest the pioneers of the New Kingdom should be unduly impatient with the best that the Old Dispensation has produced. It is characteristic of Him that here, in presence of the crowd which had heard Him send a rebuke to John, He should hasten on to a eulogy. The passage rushes on through a series of rapid questions. A *reed*? No, "there was nothing supple about John, as Herod found."² A *man* clothed in soft raiment? No, there was nothing here in common with the easy-going, luxury-loving world. A *prophet*? Even that designation scarcely sufficed: it was not given to every prophet to see the face of the King Whom he foretold. *Much more* than a prophet, therefore: and then follows the amazing paradox that must have taken the hearers' breath away: "Among them that are born of women there is none greater than John, yet he that is but little in the Kingdom of God is greater than he." It gives us a glimpse of the immense significance which the Master read into His own mission and Kingdom. A new stage in human evolution has begun: a new type has appeared upon the earth, and, as Dr Plummer says, "The lower members of a higher class are above the higher members of a lower class." John after all represented those

The Old
Type and
the New.

¹ Dr George Macdonald.

² Dr T. R. Glover.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke vii.
18-35.

who lived by fear : his Jordan was not far from Sinai in the geography of the spirit. The new type lived by faith and love ; they would understand themselves better when Calvary was past and Pentecost had come. But Christ understood them already, and knew that the giants of the past were outdistanced by the little ones of the Kingdom.

Great
Master and
Petulant
People.

We leave this passage with a deepened sense of the greatness of the Christ ; of the greatness, within his own limits and for his own times, of the Fore-runner too ; and, by comparison, of the littleness and petulance of the unbelieving generation into which they were born. The people of the day are pictured for all time in the Master's vivid words about the children playing in the market-place. He must have watched them at their games—the very same games as they play in Palestine still, weddings and funerals, and we may believe that He watched them with a smile. Yet the smile faded into sadness as He turned from them to consider older people who were so like them, though with less excuse for their wilfulness—people who would neither have the message of God in the Baptist's sterner fashion nor would listen to it in His own gentler, happier mode, but remained self-willed, rebellious, peevish, alike through warnings and through invitations. Yet even in a foolish day Wisdom has her children, and she is justified at their hands whether she comes in stern guise or gentle. For they hear in her voice the voice of the Highest, and know that they are in touch with the Reality which outlives every human

The Baptist and the Christ

freak and whim: they learn from her to ignore Luke vii.
the drift of the hour and to build for eternity. 18-35.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

What you say about the state of your mind does not surprise me, and I trust that your views of Christian truth will ere long exert a more distinctly felt influence both in tranquillising and purifying the mind and heart. It was a good remark of a person in circumstances somewhat similar to yours, "I see there is nothing for me but my Bible and my knees."

The Letters of Dr John Brown

XXVI

THE WOMEN WHO MINISTERED

"And it came to pass afterward, that He went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with Him, And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance. . . .

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."—LUKE viii. 1-3; x. 38-42.

9. 7:36-50

Luke viii.

1-3;

x. 38-42.

**Women in
the Gospel.**

It is impossible to read this Gospel without noticing the respect and attention which it pays to women. In the Gospel of the Nativity Mary stands out very clearly in the high honour which God paid her: indeed, as we have seen, it is conceivable that her testimony is enshrined in the document. Here are two passages, which for the moment we conjoin, both peculiar to St Luke and both

The Women who Ministered

dealing with women,—certain women who ministered **Luke viii.** to Jesus, certain others who received Him as their **1-3 ;** Guest. And we have not forgotten chapter vii., **x. 38-42.** with its reminder that even a woman of a very different class from these, a sinner and an outcast, had a place in the Master's welcome and in the Evangelist's interest. In such matters we need not doubt that Luke reflects the spirit of his Lord. The coming of the Christian era marks the turning-point in the world's view of women. "No one can study society in classical antiquity or in non-Christian lands," Dr T. R. Glover says,¹ "with any intimacy, and not realise this. . . . There is no reference made by Jesus to women that is not respectful and sympathetic. He never warns men against women. Even the most degraded women find in Him an amazing sympathy, for He has the secret of being pure and kind at the same time. His purity has not to be protected: it is itself a purifying force." Now if these women received much from Him, of honour and help, they gave much to Him in grateful acknowledgment. That is the thought which binds these two paragraphs together.

1. The group in the opening of chapter viii. is Rich not much more to us than a group of names. About enough to help. Mary Magdalene we do know more than about the others, but we must beware of assuming her identity with the woman of the previous chapter. The word "Magdalene" has come to have in modern ears a certain moral significance. We must not

¹ *The Jesus of History*, p. 130.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. forget that it was purely a geographical designation ;
i-3 ; and though her case before Christ delivered her
x. 38-42. was hard enough, there is no shred of evidence to
identify her with the waif of the preceding story.
Yet there is one sense in which the present paragraph
is of one substance and spirit with the end of
chapter vii. The woman of the streets ministered
to her Saviour with the gift that she could bring.
These women also, perhaps of more position and
substance, ministered to Him, it may be less
emotionally but no less gratefully and loyally.
“What is rich?” Emerson asks in one of his
essays : “Are you rich enough to help anybody?”
We do not know the social position of these women,
or the amount of their resources. Possibly the
ministry was a very simple and frugal one. But
at any rate they were rich enough in soul to want
to be helpful, and the Master gratefully accepted
the help which was the token of their trust and
thankfulness.

**Active and
Contempla-
tive.**

2. The two sisters who meet us in the end of
chapter x. are much more than names to us, because
we are admitted to their home—a home that is
made more vivid to our imaginations than any
other home in the Gospel story, partly because
of the additional details which the Fourth Gospel
records. But even apart from this further infor-
mation, it is a priceless and illuminating fragment
which we have here : how much character is
defined and depicted in a few simple sentences !
Martha stands out as the dominating personality :
the house is hers : Mary comes in as her sister.

The Women who Ministered

And in the little drama which follows, the active **Luke viii.**
and contemplative types of character are sketched **1-3 ;**
for all time. **x. 38-42.**

(a) Martha is the type of active sainthood. Was **Martha the**
she a saint at all? Not in the judgment of those **Active.**
who compiled the early lists of martyrs and other
worthies. Perhaps, if we incline to be severe, we
judge her too exclusively by the single moment
which is here depicted, when, as John Newton
sings,

“Busy Martha angry grew
And lost her time and temper too.”

On a larger survey, there are some things to be set
down to her credit. Let it be remembered that
she opened her house to the Master, even, as the
Fourth Gospel reveals, in late and sombre hours
when foes were many and friends few: and up to
her lights she did her best to serve His needs.
“Martha was a saint,” Teresa,¹ that other great
active spirit, says, “though not said to be a con-
templative. Now what desire ye more than to be
able to resemble this blessed woman who deserved
to entertain our Lord Jesus Christ in her house so
often, and to dress His meat, and serve Him, and
eat at His table?” We need not perhaps put
her as high as Meister Eckhart did when he said,
“Mary is still at school: Martha hath learned her
lesson.” Yet Martha is one of those who do the
work of the world and of the Church: she has
her own place in the Master’s praise, her own crown
of glory.

¹ *The Way of Perfection.*

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii.

i-3 ;

x. 38-42.

Mary the
Contempla-
tive.

(b) As clearly, Mary is the contemplative. It is her characteristic position to be found at the Master's feet.¹ Her soul is in her eyes and her ears. It is possible she has the defect of her quality—that touch of dreaminess which may be an irritation to the more bustling and practical type. Madame Guyon in her autobiography confesses how annoying her devout absent-mindedness was to her husband: "I was so strongly occupied within that I forgot many things and gave ground to my husband for being vexed." Even so may Martha have put her finger on a defect in sisterly relationships which did not happen once alone. Yet the Evangelist's point, and surely our Lord's point, was this—that Mary was after all remembering something which for the moment Martha was in danger of forgetting. What is the meaning of the "one thing needful" which is left so undefined? Jerome and the Vulgate take us in one direction when they render it *Porro unum est necessarium*—one dish is needful, as if Martha had been preparing too elaborate a repast. Other interpretations take us to an opposite extreme, as if Mary were the one saved soul in the little household and Martha had bustled herself outside the Kingdom. Happily the true reading solves the problem. Three of the best and oldest MSS. unite to read, "Few things are needful—or only one." If we can imagine our Lord saying this with a pause between the clauses, we may take the first clause as referring

¹ Cf. St Luke x. 39; St John xi. 32; xii. 3.

The Women who Ministered

to Martha's dishes. But it was the way of His **Luke viii.** mind to travel from the seen to the unseen and 1-3 ; find parables in common things. And with the **x. 38-42.** phrase "or only one," He had transferred the thought to another level. Mary had chosen the good portion, the feast better than any spread by human hands. What was it, this better feast, this supreme joy ? If we may define the undefined, is it not the *grace of receiving* ? Martha had learned somewhat of what she might do for her Master : Mary had learned the even deeper and more fundamental lesson of what she might receive from Him.

Ought there not to be something of both these **The Complete Character.** qualities in the ideal woman, or, for that matter, in the ideal man ? Both were found in the ministering women of chapter viii. : they gave, because they had first received. Both are found in Wordsworth's beautiful portrait of true womanhood : she must be on the one hand

"A creature not too bright and good
For human nature's daily food,"

and, on the other,

"A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller between life and death."

Stopford Brooke's biographer says of him, "He did not always perceive . . . that in the actual world Mary is often another name for Martha off duty." There is surely something of each of these sisters in the other. Give Mary time, and her service will outshine Martha's in intensity and

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. cost. Give Martha a wider space than that of the
i-3 ; fevered moment which is so clearly pictured here,
x. 38-42. and surely she will hear amid her worries and
troubles the voice of the most welcome Guest to
whom she ever ministered: "Come unto Me,
all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will
give you rest."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

I am glad to hear that Christ and ye are
one, and that ye have made Him your one
thing. Whereas many are painfully toiled in
seeking many things, and their many things
are nothing.

Samuel Rutherford

XXVII

THE SEED AND THE SOIL

“And when much people were gathered together, and were come to Him out of every city, He spake by a parable: A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. And His disciples asked Him, saying, What might this parable be? And He said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand. Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”—LUKE viii. 4-15.

WE thank our Lord for two things in connection **LUKE viii.** with this familiar parable: they are not perhaps **4-15.** the greatest things connected with it, but they are

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. 4-15. well worth noting as we hurry inwards to the centre of His message.

Among the Cornfields. One is the clear glimpse of a Galilean cornfield. We are allowed to look at it through the eyes of the Master Himself, and His glance misses nothing. Here is the trodden track across the middle of it, "hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet."¹ Here are the eager birds seizing their chance. Here are the slabs of rock, sometimes edging themselves above the soil but more often lightly buried beneath it, so that the eye assumes a depth of earth which is not really there. Here are the foul patches, choked with thorns, where nothing good can really find room to grow. And here is the good soil, the true destiny of the seed, the eye's delight, the farmer's reward. We thank the Master for this picture in the great book of His teaching: its colours will never fade while spring-time and harvest endure.

The Parables as a Test.

The other is a hint of the meaning of Christ's parabolic method—His philosophy of parables. It is plain from v. 10 that the parables were no happy accident in His teaching, or a mere overflow from a mind richly stored by observation and reflection. They were part of a deliberate plan—to sift out His hearers. To the eager, child-like enquiring heart, here was something to ask questions about, a hint of truth and beauty and a promise of more: this parable had largely attained its end when the disciples gathered round Him to ask Him to explain

¹ Stanley. *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 425, in a very vivid paragraph describing just such a field.

The Seed and the Soil

it. To those who had not even the desire to know **Luke viii.**
—the self-satisfied, the proud, the indifferent— **4-15.**

the parable was a sheath and a screen, though even in their case the story might haunt the memory and provoke them some day to enquiry. What Blaise Pascal says in general of the Christian revelation and its evidences is true not least of our Lord's parables: "there is always light enough for those who desire to see, just as there is always darkness enough for those who love the darkness." So, even in so simple a story as this, judgment and mercy were at work together.

But the chief interest of this passage, which **A Parable of Experience.** subordinates everything else to itself, is that here we have a picture, provided by Himself, of our Lord's own ministry. "The situation, as Jesus saw it, when full proof had been made of His ministry in Galilee, is reflected with poignant accuracy in the parable of the Sower."¹ And when we follow His gaze across the varied contents of the farmer's field, we are really following His loving and laden heart through certain phases and aspects of His experience as the Great Husbandman. "The seed is the word of God," and it is the Sower Who is telling the story.

1. He knew the roadside type of hearer—the **The Way-side.** mind which, if we may adopt a familiar and homely

¹ Dr Anderson Scott, *Dominus Noster*, p. 57, who also points out that the sifting quality in the parables was specially true of the "parables of the Kingdom." There were parables of another type, e.g. the Pharisee and the Publican, which were plain enough even to opponents.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. phrase, does not “take in” the message. A
4-15. widely known hymn says,

“Tell me the story slowly
That I may take it in.”

And our Lord had sometimes to deal with hearers, either so careless and indifferent, or so ignorant, or so forgetful, that they did not really take in His message, and the seed lay an easy prey to enemy or accident. George Tyrrell describes a modern parallel when he writes of those “whose religion consists of a few easy platitudes remembered from childhood, seeds still lying by the wayside, which have never struck root so as to become a living growth developing *pari passu* with the growth of the soul. . . . Such minds are an easy prey to the shallow sophist who has no difficulty in persuading them of the untenableness of their religious notions; nor is it with much of a wrench that they part from the faith which they have never understood and never loved.”¹

The Shallow
Soil.

2. And He knew the shallow-soil hearer—his apparent reception of the message; his joy in receiving it, so gratifying to a teacher's heart; then the restlessness which will not stand any real test of endurance. Once more the type is an immortal one. If our Lord took the rootless man out of the life of Galilee and from among the hearers of His message, Bunyan took Pliable out of the difficult days of the Act of Uniformity. “The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's

¹ *Hard Sayings*, p. 32.

The Seed and the Soil

heart," said he to Christian's glowing descriptions Luke viii. of heaven: "My good companion, glad am I to 4-15. hear of these things; come on, let us mend our pace." But this reception of the word "with joy" was before the Slough of Despond: after that test, his tune was changed: "May I get out again with my life, you shall possess the brave country alone for me." There is a phrase, hackneyed by much use—"the deepening of the spiritual life." Does not our Lord's parable restore to that phrase its poetry, and in so doing, does it not convince us of our need?

3. And He knew the thorny-ground hearer. The Thorny Ground. There were so many lives in which there seemed little room for the good seed to grow. The very variations between the evangelists are instructive here: Matthew has "care of this world and deceitfulness of riches": Mark has "care of this world and deceitfulness of riches and the lusts of other things": Luke has "cares and riches and pleasures." It seems that a sluggard's garden is so rich in weeds that different observers may pluck different handfuls all telling the same story. The Psalmist knew himself and human life, who prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God." And so pray we, with the Master's parable to warn and teach us. For a cleansed heart is an undivided heart. And an undivided heart is the harvest ground of God.

4. Who shall measure the sadness brought by The Good Ground. innumerable cases such as these to the heart of Him Who was Wisdom and Love in one? Yet

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. He had His compensations and His joys, and if
4-15.

we have seen several windows opened into His sorrow and disappointment, here also is a window that opens into His gladness, "They which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." Bengel, in his exact succinct way, points out that in St Luke's version of this, the happier side of the message, we see precisely the opposite of the three unsatisfactory types already described. These nobler souls "keep" the word, "not as on the wayside." They "bring forth fruit," "not as among the thorns." They bring it forth "with patience," "not as on the rocky ground." It has been pointed out¹ that the phrase here translated "honest and good" was practically the Greek equivalent for the modern word "gentleman." And we can believe that our Lord, amid His many disappointments, found great comfort in these fair-minded and responsive souls, who brought with them the courtesy of a close attention and the fragrance of a manifest sincerity.

**Risks and
Hopes.**

Does the total impression of the parable amount to pessimism or optimism? Let us note that our Lord says nothing about quantities or proportions. It is enough that He warns us well of what may be. Robertson of Brighton preached a great sermon on this parable, after a confirmation service, when seven hundred young people had taken upon their consciences the vows of discipleship. It was a natural and instinctive hope that all this

¹ S. C. Carpenter, *Christianity according to St Luke*, p. 190.

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multitude of youthful lives should by and by walk **Luke viii.**
with Christ in white, having proved themselves worthy. **4-15.**

"Experience," he sadly said, "forces us to correct that sanguine anticipation." And with experience and this parable, twin books of warning, open before him, he told of the risk, almost amounting to a certainty, that some would lose their innocence, some become frivolous and artificial, some be taken captive by the world's cold, deadening hand. Yet, if our Lord, like many of His wisest servants, warns us well of the risks, He deliberately chooses to close on the hopeful note. He would have us remember that, when hearts are truly open to the good seed, it can do so much and bring forth so much. *An hundredfold!*—now we hear the feet of the reapers coming, and their songs of rejoicing, as they thrust in their sickles and gather their sheaves. It is like the Lord of Love to leave us, after all, not despairing, but believing and expecting, for ourselves and for others. We can only ask for ourselves that we may have grace to fulfil His expectations, lest we disappoint Him in the day of His appearing.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Father of Mercies, we have need
Of Thy preparing grace:
Let the same Hand that gives the seed
Provide a fruitful place.

The Olney Hymns

XXVIII

TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed ; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest ; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear : for whosoever hath, to him shall be given ; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have. Then came to Him His mother and His brethren, and could not come at Him for the press. And it was told Him by certain which said, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to see Thee. And He answered and said unto them, My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it. . . .

"And it came to pass, as He spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto Him, Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked. But He said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."—LUKE viii. 16-21 ; xi. 27, 28.

Luke viii. THESE passages may be considered together because
16-21 ; they deal with the right hearing of the word of
xi. 27, 28. God. The parable of the Sower has been a sufficient
Right reminder of the very varied reception given even
Hearing. to our Lord's own ministry, and though He said
nothing about proportions it was evident that
there was enough unprofitable hearing to cause
Him great sadness of heart. Savonarola, in the
midst of his long travail for Florence, also discovered,

Take Heed How Ye Hear

as many a preacher before and after him has **Luke viii.** discovered, how much unprofitable hearing there **16-21** ; could be. "Preach to these men as one may, **xi. 27-28.** they have taken the habit of listening well and yet acting ill. This habit hath become a second nature, and they continue to listen without obeying." And again, "Thou wilt become like unto a rook on a steeple, that, at the first stroke of the church bell, takes the alarm and hath fear, but then, when accustomed to the sound, percheth quietly on the bell, however loudly it be rung."¹ Our Lord had to face a like indifference as indicated by the three-fold warning about the need of hearing well: "Take heed how ye hear" (viii. 18): "My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it" (viii. 21): "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it" (xi. 28). Each of these sayings is the climax of a paragraph: let us notice what leads up to them.

1. In the first paragraph the opening sentence **The Duty of the Illuminated.** —the familiar saying about the candlestick, which St Matthew gives in another setting in the Sermon on the Mount, seems at first sight a curiously abrupt transition from the parable of the Sower, which it follows in Mark as here. Yet the underlying sequence is plain enough. These disciples are now initiated: they have come to their Master to ask questions and to be taught the mysteries of the heavenly Kingdom: and as Christ's initiates, they have the responsibility of illuminating their world.

¹ Villari's *Savonarola*, p. 478.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. There is no really esoteric doctrine in Christianity
16-21 ; —select teaching for a favoured few. It might
xi. 27, 28. have looked like it for a moment when the Master
veiled the truth in parable; but if any harsh
inferences were drawn from that, v. 17 ought to be
enough to correct them: "Nothing is hidden
that will not be disclosed, nothing concealed that
will not be known and revealed."¹ The reserve
of a parable is an educative and temporary reserve,
and those who are initiated may tell all they know
—indeed it is their duty and responsibility to tell
what they know—to tell it alike by what they
say and what they are, "that they which enter in
may see the light." One is reminded of Paul's
picture in 1 Cor. xiv. of the outsider entering
into the Christian assembly and falling down, in
presence of the manifest power and sincerity of the
gathering, to confess that God is there of a truth.
The real truth of Christianity has always come
to light not only in what Christ's servants have
said but what they have been. And Henry
Vaughan's verse about the saints is not far from
the truth of the Master's ideal for His followers:

"They are indeed our Pillar-fires
Seen as we go;
They are that Citie's shining spires
We travell to.
A swordlike gleam
Kept man for sin
First *Out*: this beame
Will guide him *In*."

¹ Moffatt.

Take Heed How Ye Hear

The Christian character is a mighty revelation **Luke viii.**
of what Christianity really means, an open secret **16-21 ;**
for all the world to read. **xi. 27, 28.**

That is why there is such a solemn urgency at **Ears and**
this point on the counsel, "Take heed, therefore, **no Ears.**
how ye hear." It is as though the Master would
say, "Listen, as those who can help the word to
do its work in the world." Is it not a hard law
that immediately follows? "For whosoever hath,
to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not,
from him shall be taken away even that which he
thinketh he hath." It is often enough true in
the kingdom of this world, which is a hard and
cruel place. "Money makes money"—to him
that hath shall be given. "Give a dog a bad name
and hang him"—from him that hath not shall
be taken away even his poor possession. But it
seems an ungracious law to operate in the heavenly
Kingdom. Yet we look at it again in its setting
and it does not seem so ungracious after all. If
a man has the hearing ear—and this even the
child or the poorest may bring—to him shall be
added all that shall make his character radiant
and complete. If he will not bring that, then
there is nothing to save him from deterioration
and spiritual bankruptcy. This is not an arbitrary
award: it is in the nature of things: it could not
be otherwise.

2. Again the emphasis on right hearing returns **The Larger**
in **v. 21.** "My mother and My brethren are these **Family.**
which hear the word of God and do it." Much
controversy has raged round the "brethren" of

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. our Lord, the Roman Catholic view (followed by
16-21 ; some others) being that they were cousins, or
xi. 27, 28. children of Joseph by a former marriage. But
there is really no reason to avoid the simple and
natural interpretation of this and other passages,
or to think of these men as other than Mary's
younger sons. Our Lord's words imply no necessary
censure upon her or them. Yet if they were indeed
the group of "friends" of whom Mark tells us,
who went out to lay hands on Jesus because they
said, "He is beside Himself," we can feel how
lonely His heart may have been for a time in His
own home, and how eagerly He turned to the new
and larger family who were held together not by
a physical but by a moral and spiritual tie. Here
we may turn our thoughts to xi. 27, 28, where the
message is closely parallel. A woman in the crowd
—one somehow pictures her as of an emotional,
excitable type—lifted her voice to tell Him how
honoured was the mother that bore Him. But
again our Lord quite definitely put aside the
physical tie, and emphasised the moral and spiritual
affinity. "Yea, rather, blessed are they that
hear the word of God and keep it." The larger
family, the higher order, the New Race—this is
His care and His desire.

**The Master's
Brethren.**

There is a New Testament sequence along
which it is good for the heart to travel. "My
. . . brethren are these which hear the word of
God"—that is the first step. The second is in
Paul's words (Rom. viii. 29)—"that He might
be the first-born among many brethren": the

Take Heed How Ye Hear

travail of the ages, and all the over-ruling of God's **Luke viii.** will is at work to create brothers to Jesus Christ. **16-21** ; And the third stage is in the words of Hebrews **xi. 27, 28.** (ii. 11), "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." They are only in the making yet, these brethren of His ; but if with honest and good hearts they desire to receive God's truth and to do His will, then, in spite of their imperfections, the Master claims them and will acknowledge them before earth and heaven. We may well take heed how we hear, if to hear rightly is to cross the threshold of a fellowship so honoured and blessed.

To hear ! It is such a little thing, yet it is one **The Family Likeness.** of the greatest and most fruitful achievements of the saints of God. Their Master was a listener : as they too learn to listen, there runs through them the likeness of their King. The attentive look is part of the family likeness of the children of the Highest. If we were to be told that a voice was going to speak out of space and tell us the secrets of the stars, how eagerly we should listen. There is a Voice that tells us the secrets of the Heart of God,—do we give worthy hearing ? To hear aright should be our pride and joy ; to refuse to hear is to show that we have not known the day of our visitation.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The old man has five senses : the man regenerate has only his hearing. *Bossuet*

God speaks with a man not through any

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii.
16-21 ;
xi. 27, 28.

corporal creation dinning itself into bodily ears: but He speaks by the truth itself, if any man be fit to hear with the mind not with the body. For to that part of the man does He so speak which in man is better than the rest of which man consists, and than which God Himself alone is better.

St Augustine

XXIX

THE MASTER OF WINDS AND WAVES

“Now it came to pass on a certain day, that He went into a ship with His disciples : and He said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth. But as they sailed He fell asleep : and there came down a storm of wind on the lake ; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy. And they came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then He arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water : and they ceased, and there was a calm. And He said unto them, Where is your faith ? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this ! for He commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey Him.”—LUKE viii. 22-25.

ONCE more, in a scene upon the Galilean lake, the **Luke viii.** lake itself refuses to hold the drama that is enacted **22-25.** upon it. We have seen this already in the case **A Message** of the great Draught of Fishes : as we read of it, **for Seas** it becomes not only the incident of a moment, **Uncharted.** but a timeless parable of failure and success. And the same feeling comes to us as we watch the Stilling of the Storm. It is the incident of a crossing ; yet perhaps it is the smaller part of its meaning that is contained between the western and the eastern shore. The greater part of its teaching and comfort belongs to seas uncharted, to that great ocean of life and experience which

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. is never, in any age, without its storms and ship-
22-25. wrecks. The "nine nautical verses" of Psalm cvii. have been understood, and felt in all their soothing power, by many who never set foot on sea-going vessel: . . . "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven." . . . And it would be a poor ending to this tremendous passage about Christ stilling the storm if we thought its meaning and reference were exhausted by the time the great calm fell. Once again what we are really watching is the revelation of a Personality, and, though the temporary circumstances will never occur again, they suffice in their brief duration to reveal a power and compassion which are eternal.

**Divine
Lowliness.**

As regards the incident we notice, not for the only time in the Gospel records, that the central wonder is clothed in descriptive phrases so natural, so simple, so matter-of-fact, that we are turned into eye-witnesses, and the vivid march of events carries the wonder with it into our belief before we have time to make difficulties. The event is dated more precisely by St Mark than by St Luke: it was on the evening of the great day of teaching when Christ gave the parable of the Sower, and the multitude so thronged the shore that He had to teach from a boat. We can read the strain and fatigue of such a day into the simple phrase of Luke (v. 23): "As they sailed away He fell asleep." There used to be a line of attack upon such a story as the Stilling of the Storm, which

The Master of Winds and Waves

either denied its historical reality or explained it **Luke viii.** away, by saying that it was "out of accord with **22-25.** His state of humiliation." We may rather be inclined to say that even in the Stilling of the Storm we are not allowed to forget His state of humiliation. This weary Christ, worn out with the long day's demand, His head pillowed on the hard bench of the steersman, His rest snatched between toil and toil, in the teeth of the tempest—have we any more touching picture of His divine lowliness, or any more poignant hint of how much He gave and bore continually?

Characteristic alike of the disciples and their Master are the utterances we are called to hear **Voices in the Storm.** amid the noise of wind and surf. In regard to what the disciples said, the very divergences between the Evangelists are instructive: according to Matthew, "Lord, save us: we perish." According to Mark, "Teacher, carest Thou not that we perish?" According to Luke, "Master, Master"—there is a kind of breathless sound in the Greek syllables, *Epistata, Epistata*—"we perish." Putting the records together, we get the impression of a confused, tremendous moment of which it was impossible to give a clear report, but the essential agony of which remained as an indelible recollection. But it throws into stronger relief the quiet self-possession, the majestic resource, of the suddenly-awakened Saviour. "He checked the wind and the surf."¹ We are here in presence of something we cannot understand. What came of that word

¹ Moffatt.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. of command flung out into the teeth of the shrieking
22-25. gale? What power heard it and acted upon it? Or what link of connection and control was there between the soul of the Saviour in the boat, and the mechanical, mindless elements that beat upon it? Some, feeling these difficulties, and knowing that sudden storms may pass as suddenly as they came, have taken refuge in coincidence. Yet the coincidence-theory is somewhat discounted in advance by the panic of the fishermen who knew the Lake and the ways of its storms, but on this occasion had no hope of deliverance except when Christ intervened. After all, the line of connection and control between His will and the turbulent winds is no easier and no more difficult to explain than the line of connection and control between His will and the germs of disease. In presence of both classes of facts, we can only ask, "What manner of man is this?" and pray that we may have spiritual vision enough to give an adequate answer.

Is it a One other question may be asked, as we watch
Prophecy? that erect Figure in the boat, secure and sure of His own security, authoritative and sure of His own authority. Is it a picture not merely of what the Son of Man was, but of what man himself shall be when he has attained his full stature, and learnt all the secrets, natural and spiritual, which his Father is waiting to teach him? Morals and metaphysics are two separate departments of our knowledge. The tendency of our modern day is to construe even such a message as that of the

The Master of Winds and Waves

Incarnation more along the line of morals than of **Luke viii.** metaphysics. Yet there may be points, in the **22-25.**

Incarnation and elsewhere, where morals and metaphysics meet; and when man is at long last God's obedient child, perhaps, having been found faithful over the few things of his own life and will, he will be made ruler over the many things of Nature's storehouses, and be entrusted with many keys which now are hung beyond his reach. We see not this as yet, but we see Jesus.

And when we see Him, we feel again with renewed **Faith for Perilous Seas.** passion of conviction that Gennesaret is too small to hold Him, and that the greater part of this drama of the Lake is played upon an ocean which is perilous still. Those outward circumstances occurred but once: this miracle of peace falling upon the troubled waters occurs a thousand times. If we had faith, should we not know it to be so? Indeed we must have faith greater than that of the disciples; in that moment it was only the alphabet of faith that they were asked to learn. We must have faith that can survive even outward tragedy and the shipwreck of many hopes and plans, and can wait to see good come out of positive disaster.

“For God hath many wrecks within the sea;
Oh, it is deep! I look in fear and wonder:
The wisdom throned above is dark to me,
Yet it is sweet to think His care is under;
That yet the sunken treasure may be drawn
Into His storehouse, when the sea is gone.”¹

¹ Carl Spencer.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. We must have faith that can endure not one rough
22-25. night upon the waters but many nights and days, assured of a Love which is ruling the waves even when it is not smoothing them, and which will bring its own at last to the Harbour of Peace. When Thomas Carlyle tells of the death of Oliver Cromwell, he breaks off into two verses of the Metrical Psalm :

“The storm is changed into calm
At His command and will,
So that the waves which raged before
Now quiet are and still.

Then are they glad—because at rest
And quiet now they be ;
So to the haven He them brings
Which they desired to see.”

Where is our faith ? If we had faith, we should know that in the mightiest tempest there is One Who can speak quietness to our hearts, and that His last gift is also quietness, when all the storms are done.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Would you have the presence of God with you ? Learn to wait quietly for the salvation you expect from Him. Then, indeed, is He glorified, when He is trusted in a storm.

John Owen

XXX

A DIVIDED PERSONALITY

“And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when He went forth to land, there met Him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God most high? I beseech Thee, torment me not. (For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For often-times it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness). And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought Him that He would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought Him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and He went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought Him that he might be with

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. Him : but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.”—LUKE viii. 26-39.

“**Legion.**” THE story of the demoniac of Gerasa¹ raises many difficulties, and intellectual giants have contended over it. It may help us to a devotional and practical use of it if we notice its touches of verisimilitude ; and indeed the very soil of that region has thrown up evidence to support and confirm the most picturesque of the details. Sir George Adam Smith tells² how he came there upon some peasants who had newly dug up an ancient stone. It was the tombstone of a Roman soldier, and the inscription ran as follows : “ Publius Aelius, a soldier of the 14th Legion, 40 years old, 19 years in the army. His heirs, Marcus Gaius and Rufinus, saw to everything.” The word “ Legion ” suddenly appearing out of the distant past in that very district sets us thinking, especially when we are told that the same word was found carved upon many other stones : it was an unhealthy, fever-haunted area, and many Roman soldiers died there. Now we consider the human mind and what we moderns know of its curious response to “ suggestion.” And then we turn to this poor distracted creature roaming about, with the tombs for his only shelter. He may have seen that very grave of Publius Aelius : in any case the word

¹ Gerasa is now generally accepted as the correct place-name, and is identified with Kherza on the east shore of the Lake.

² *Historical Geography*, p. 461.

A Divided Personality

Legion would often meet his gaze. His mind **Luke viii.** seized the suggestion that was in it. Just as his **26-39.** own Galilee was under the incubus of a foreign domination, so his being was in the grasp of a power he could not understand. And in his wild and distracted view of things, the word *Legion*, so often seen upon the stones, that word of multitudinous might, seemed to him to describe his own condition, swayed this way and that, he could not tell how, but without unity and therefore without peace. "My name is Legion," he said.

There are other elements in the story which **Touches of Evidence.** bid us give good heed to it and not cast it lightly aside. It belongs to the oldest stratum of Gospel material and to the "Triple Tradition." It is told with extraordinary vividness and pathos. This is specially true of St Mark's narrative, where we feel as if an eye-witness were speaking to us, his mind still full of the horrible details of the case. Returning to St Luke, we find a quiet convincingness in his description of the man after the cure, every detail bearing indirect evidence to what had gone before: he was "sitting"—no longer a restless wanderer: he was "clothed"—no longer naked: he was "in his right mind"—no longer a furious and dangerous maniac: he was "at the feet of Jesus"—no longer shunning human company. And another touch of verisimilitude is added in the request of the people—to which all the Synoptics bear witness—that Christ would depart from their district. That has no parallel in the Gospel story. It does

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. not seem a likely insertion unless there was
26-39. historical fact behind it; and incidentally it throws a confirmatory light on the point which has caused most difficulty to many readers—the incident of the swine. For the mere cure of one who was a danger to his neighbours would not have stirred this mood of popular dread; and in spite of Professor Huxley's moral indignation at "destruction of property," it looks as though for once something destructive had coincided with, or followed upon, Christ's work of exceeding mercy.

**Problems
that remain.**

There are difficulties, of course, which with our present knowledge we cannot solve. It is too late in the day for faith and devotion to ignore difficulties, or to invent cheap explanations which will not stand the test of serious thought. It is better and more honest to make room for a certain marginal agnosticism, if at the centre we can still find a living message. The difficulty here is partly harmonistic: why has St Matthew two demoniacs, while the second and third Gospels show us only one? It is partly psychological. If we assume the objective reality of some sort of "possession" or psychic invasion, is it credible that this applies to animals, as well as to men? It is only a partial answer to point out that animals, not least in droves and herds, are sometimes peculiarly susceptible to conditions of psychic excitement. And the difficulty is partly moral—that very point over which Huxley and Gladstone contended so strenuously—the destruction of property, if not at our Lord's command, apparently with His

A Divided Personality

permission. A sane and believing commentator **Luke viii.** like Dr Plummer leans to one of two explanations ; 26-39.

either the incident of the swine was "necessary to convince the demoniacs and their neighbours of the completeness of the cure," or "the keepers of the swine were Jews, who were breaking the Jewish law," whose consciences presumably condemned this type alike of property and occupation. It may be so : perhaps it is best to say that we do not fully understand.

Yet out of it all, to a reading that is devotional and not merely antiquarian, there emerges something that is at once positive and permanent. It is not in such a story alone that we hear of divided personality,—divided (as it seems to some) by invasion from without, or (as it seems to others—how can we speak except in pictures of a region where spatial measures do not apply ?) by fissures from within. We have learned that our thoughts, feelings, impulses tend to run in sets or groups ; and students of morbid mentality tell us that it is possible for a personality to be divided along the line of such groupings, one system dominating the others, or the systems taking it in turn to dominate the whole. The records of modern medical psychology might produce a good many cases, milder perhaps than the story of the madman of Gerasa, yet to a certain extent parallel, in which a personality is torn and distracted between the warring elements in its own being.

From that it is but a step to something much more common, in regard to which many who have

The Divided
Self in
Psychology.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke viii. never consulted a nerve specialist might give
26-39. their testimony. Its simplest form is the divided
—and in the self as St Paul pictures it in Romans vii.—the
Spiritual eternal conflict between the flesh and the soul,
Life. both parts of ourselves. A certain saintly man
was once approached by an artist who wanted to
paint his portrait. "Which of the two men in
me will you paint?" was the reply: "one is
not worth painting: the other is not yet full
grown." Those who have passed through that
experience may not say, "We are Legion," but they
may truly say, "We are two," and the two selves
in their determined wrestle and conflict bring into
the life almost as much misery and trouble as the
feet of an invading legion might bring into a
revolting land. Indeed, the case is sometimes
subtler than any such division will describe. A
life may be deprived of its unity by the sway of
distracting impulse, or by the dominion of wild and
wayward passion, or even in some cases by thoughts
that will not cohere into a system or unite in action.
It is very curious to find Henri-Frédéric Amiel,
that gently brooding spirit, twice over in his
journal echoing the cry from Gerasa and saying
of himself, "My name is Legion." When we
investigate his meaning, we find that he was torn
asunder by thought as some are torn by appetite
and passion. "In me, reflection comes to no
useful end, because it is for ever returning upon
itself, disputing and debating: I am wanting in
both the general who commands and the judge
who decides."

A Divided Personality

What do such souls need? Does not the ancient **Luke viii.** Psalmist put the right prayer into their lips when **26-39.** he says, "*Unite my heart* that I may fear Thy name?" A human personality is a wonderful and wealthy heritage, if only it is not dissipated, divided, distracted—if only its store of generous impulse, of warm affection, of reasonable thought, is poured into one channel and guided in one wise way. And as we watch the marvellous mission of Jesus, we cannot but see how His overshadowing personality, so full of power and peace, did this uniting, controlling work on lives that were divided and distracted. He did it for the demoniac of Gerasa. He is able to do it still for lives that without Him can find no unity and no harmony. If our hearts were but entirely yielded to His control, we too might seek out our friends and tell them what great things God has done for us.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Now to be Thine, *yea, Thine alone,*
O Lamb of God, I come.

Charlotte Elliot

XXXI

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE

"Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And He sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. And He said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece. And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them. And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by Him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; And of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see Him. And the apostles, when they were returned, told Him all that they had done."—LUKE ix. 1-10.

Luke ix.
1-10.
Disciples
and Apostles.

THE twelve Disciples have now become Apostles indeed, for they are sent out upon their Master's errands. It was a preparation for the day when His visible presence should be taken away from them: they must learn to find their feet, to act upon their own initiative, to wear the mantle of their future calling. Even apart from their own training, there was need of such a mission: the

The Mission of the Twelve

work grew: the days sped past: there was need **Luke ix.** for helpers, heralds, harvesters. It was a vast **i-10.** responsibility for frail, half-taught men, thus to represent their Master and share in His work. We are inclined to smile or to frown when one of His ministers takes to himself the title of "Vicar of Christ": the splendour of his triple crown cannot conceal his inadequacy for so high a task. Yet there is a sense and a measure in which that office belongs to everyone, the least and the weakest, who is sent upon the Master's errands. He had great faith in these men, in spite of all their imperfections and immaturities, when He sent them out to preach and to heal: Galilee might judge Him by His vicars and delegates: the heralds might hinder souls from seeing the King.

What was He doing when they were away upon **Their** their evangelistic journey? There is no record: **Intercessor.** yet perhaps we know Him well enough by this time to guess two things at least. He was carrying on His own work: a weary Christ we have already seen, but an idle Christ we cannot even imagine. And He was praying: not more certainly did their shadow follow them along the sunny highways than their Master's prayers followed them into every task and trial. Had ever messengers of God so mighty and tender a support? Those who serve Him still, if they truly believe in Him, might lift up their heads, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

They were wealthy men as they went forth at their Master's bidding, for did He not share with

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix. them three things at least, these words being
1-10. witness?

Adequacy. 1. He shared with them His own *adequacy* to meet human ills and needs. They had it but in trust from Him, but they had it. "He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases." The robe of authority would have been an uncomfortable garment to wear if power had been lacking; but power and authority together make heavy responsibilities light. "What is to be observed here," Dr Denney says,¹ "is that we see already Him Who had been baptised with the Holy Spirit and power baptising His followers with the same. . . . They could do what they could not do before because He enabled them to do it, and the sense of this is a rudimentary form of the specially Christian consciousness." In this matter the very humblest and most retiring disciple, never called to public service nor to handle officially the problems of the suffering world, might well walk in the tracks of the Apostles in the hope of learning their secret. Is not this the key and the clue to the character as well as to the achievements of Christ's servants through all the ages? —*they could do what they could not do before because He enabled them to do it.*

Detachment. 2. He shared with them His own *detachment* of spirit. At least the way in which He sent them forth, saying, "Take nothing for your journey, neither staves nor scrip, neither bread, neither

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 221

The Mission of the Twelve

money, neither have two coats," was a severe **Luke ix.** lesson in detachment. The atmosphere, if one **1-10.** may be pardoned the anachronism, is Franciscan: say rather that Francis tried to reproduce this primitive programme, in another age, beneath other skies, with a literalness of imitation which perhaps our Lord neither expected nor desired. The very fact that St Mark's version of the counsels permits a staff hints that here, as so often, the spirit is more than the letter. And the spirit is the spirit of detachment: perhaps Bernard of Clairvaux had the essence of it, even when he was riding on a mule with splendid trappings; for he was so intent upon his Lord and upon his task that he really did not notice what kind of animal had been lent him for his journey. So these "little poor men of Christ" in Galilee learned a Spartan simplicity: they learned to travel without show, to sojourn without fuss—"Whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide and thence depart": and withal, to give these other qualities meaning, they must have possessed a child-like faith. Madame Guyon, writing of the difficulty of the detached spirit and the natural human desire to hold on to things, says, "If in a whole century there are three persons who are so dead to everything that they are willing to be the plaything of Providence, then they are prodigies of grace." The disciples of Jesus apparently were willing to be "the plaything of providence." But providence did not play with them; it provided for them. In the end of the day Christ had His question

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix. and they had their answer (xxii. 35). "He said
1-10. unto them, When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing."

Urgency. 3. He shared with them also His own sense of the *solemn urgency* of the hour. They were to take with them a certain sense of being the messengers of Destiny: men must choose for themselves whether they would hear or disobey, but the messengers, like their Master, must discharge their responsibility. This could not be much more vividly put than it is in v. 5: "Whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them." In his book, *Vision and Authority*, Dr John Oman has a fine chapter on what he calls "a forgotten Sacrament." He points out that our Lord was exceedingly sparing in His use of the symbolic. The washing with water, the breaking of bread and pouring of wine, the touch of hands in blessing or healing—this is almost all. But there is also the symbolic action mentioned here—this shaking off of the dust of the feet. Paul and Barnabas used it when they left Antioch (Acts xiii. 51). It is a forgotten sacrament; no one uses it now: but perhaps it has a meaning for us still. For it is a sacrament of failure: the other sacraments are sacraments of success, marking the progress, the victory, the continuity of the Church. There may be need of some such solemn and awful sign to mark the point when Christ's messengers have done their utmost, and are com-

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pelled to testify before heaven and earth that they **Luke ix.**
are clear from the blood of souls. Even such a **I-IO.**
sign might have been in its own dumb way a last
appeal: there would have been gladness for the
messengers of Christ and joy among the angels of
God had anyone read it so, and even at the twelfth
hour had hastened after the departing heralds to
surrender to the standard of the Kingdom.

We read on, and hear the murmur of interest **An unquiet**
and excitement rising from cottage and village **Heart.**
and country road till it reaches castles and palaces.
The rumours reached even the ears of Herod—
confused, inconsistent, imaginative, but leaving all
the more room for a guilty conscience to weave
its own interpretations. Herod could not take
the rumours quietly: Herod had murdered sleep.
There is no more significant word in the paragraph
than the *Ego* which the Greek makes so emphatic
—"John have *I* beheaded, but who is this?"
Herod had desired to see Him, and one day, so this
Gospel tells us (xxiii. 8), he had his wish. Meantime
we have but a momentary glimpse of him, with
sins and fears and memories crowding round him.
It is happier to be out on the open road with
Christ's poor men. Poor though they are, they
make many rich. They have nothing, but they
possess all things.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

If you are to be a Bishop, Monseigneur, for
God's sake beware of doing it by halves. . . .

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
1-10.

Ah, truly it needs great love never to be discouraged, and to bear all the crosses of such a position. It may be easy enough for shepherds whose intercourse with their flock chiefly lies in taking its produce: but it is very weighty to those who devote themselves to the salvation of souls.

Archbishop Fénelon's Letters

XXXII

HE BLESSED AND BRAKE

“ And He took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. And the people, when they knew it, followed Him : and He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing. And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto Him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals ; for we are here in a desert place. But He said unto them, Give ye them to eat. And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes ; except we should go and buy meat for all this people. For they were about five thousand men. And He said to His disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down. Then He took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude. And they did eat, and were all filled : and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.”—**LUKE ix. 10-17.**

It seems almost invariable in the New Testament **Luke ix** that when any wonder of Divine power and mercy **10-17.** puts an added strain upon our faith, some added **A Fourfold Witness.** touch of verification, some added detail of verisimilitude, bids us keep our unbelief in suspense. The greatest instance of all is the greatest wonder of all, the Resurrection. It is too good to be true : shall we dismiss it as a myth ? The records of

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
10-17.

the Resurrection of Christ, which are also the records of the resurrection of the Church, forbid us to do so. They are quick with verisimilitude; they are rich and glad with experience; the exceeding wonder seems to bring its own evidence with it. The same thought applies to the story of the Feeding of the Multitude. In some ways it is the most difficult of our Lord's works for us to grasp: we cannot visualise what happened; it runs clean across all our conventional notions of cause and effect. And yet—it is the only sign recorded in *all four* Gospels: they all agree on the main substance of the story; the variation in details only makes the different versions more life-like. There is no doubt what primitive faith said as to this strange happening, and the attempts at explaining it away have been peculiarly witless and inadequate—such as the theory that the commanding presence of Jesus made the people pull out their own provisions, or Renan's absurd suggestion that *une extrême frugalité* made a slender store go a long way round.

A Great
Task.

Let us at least watch carefully the progress of the story as it stands. Here was *a great task*—a hungry multitude, weary and in need of food at the close of an exhausting day. It was characteristic of the difference between the Master and the disciples, that *they* said, "Send them away," but *He* said, "Give ye them to eat." Here was but *poor provision* for such a task: "We have no more but five loaves and two fishes, except we should go and buy meat for all this people." In this

He Blessed and Brake

connection we are grateful to the Evangelist of the **Luke ix.**
Fourth Gospel for his portrait of the little lad **10-17.**
whose provision this was. Had he come upon the
scene, as boys will sometimes do, with the hope
of earning a few coppers? Boys with such an
aim will sometimes trot beside a great man's
chariot: here was a boy, who, though he knew
it not, was that evening minister and satellite to
the King of Kings. Here was *an orderly method*: **An Orderly**
"He said to His disciples, Make them all sit down **Method.**
by fifties in a company." Fénelon once remarked
to a friend that one of the characteristics of the
life of Christ was "an infinite love of order": and
there was something very like the Master about
this arrangement on the green hillside—its touch
of discipline, its avoidance of scramble and
confusion. Here was the way of *faith and prayer*,
for to the mind of our Lord, faith and prayer ever
went together to make power: "then He took
the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up
to heaven, He blessed them, and brake, and kept
giving to the disciples to set before the multitude."
Our grammarians point out to us that in that
sequence of verbs—"took . . . looked up . . .
blessed . . . brake"—these four indicate an action
done once and finished: the fifth verb, "kept
giving," is the imperfect of continued action. If
this be really deliberate on the Evangelist's part,
it may be meant to answer the question which is
sometimes asked—at what point in the process
did the wonder happen? That imperfect verb
places it under the touch of the Master, not during

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix. the distribution by the disciples: as Thomas Toke
10-17. Lynch has it in a familiar couplet,

“’Twas springtime when He blest the bread,
And harvest when He brake.”

And last but not least, here was that *happy super-abundance* so characteristic of divine working: “They did eat and were all filled, and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.” All the four Evangelists have those twelve baskets: when the crowd disperses and the excitement dies, they seem to remain upon the ground, a curiously matter-of-fact evidence to tell us that here was no dream.

The Peril
of the
Loaves.

In the working of our Lord, miracle shades off into parable continually, and it does so here. As with the draught of fishes and the stilling of the storm, the basin of Gennesaret refuses to hold the incident: on the margin of that crowd we are being nourished still, though not with loaves and fishes. It is experience itself which teaches us to take that larger view. That experience began immediately. Let us by all means assume and assert “the miracle of the loaves,” trusting our records, knowing the wonder of the Personality Whom these records reveal. Yet it is those very records which teach us that the miracle of the loaves had its danger as well as its triumph. It brings us to the climax and crisis of our Lord’s working. It is not accidental that even in the Synoptic Gospels the shadow of the cross begins immediately after this to fall very

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heavily and insistently upon the path: the Master **Luke ix.** begins to tell, and to tell repeatedly of His **10-17.** approaching passion. It is St John who lets us see a little behind the scenes. He shows us the multitude rushing to make Christ a King. He shows us our Lord refusing to accept a kingship according to the popular fancy. He shows us a new emphasis on the spiritual side of Christ's mission—a deliberate challenge on His part to His hearers not to seek "the meat that perisheth," but "that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." "A divine thing," Dr A. B. Bruce says of this incident,¹ "was on the point of becoming a very human thing." And so even while our Lord, out of compassion for hungry folk, held in His hand a material boon, in His heart He knew that it was necessary to apply a spiritual test. From that day to this the Church has never been quite free from the peril of the loaves and fishes—the peril of thinking that when she has them to enjoy or distribute, all is well; the peril of allowing men to think that material boons can build heaven on earth. So the story of the Feeding of the Multitude, viewed merely as a historical incident, remains upon the page quite as much for warning as for instruction: if we are Christlike, there must always be room in our hearts for men's physical needs and temporal cares: yet not that way comes the Kingdom of God.

So the incident becomes a parable of something deeper than itself—not the happening of a moment

¹ *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, p. 268.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.

10-17.

The
Perpetual
Miracle.

but the ministry of the ages. One can believe that our Lord had more motives than one in doing this thing—one of His motives being to teach His disciples, on the threshold of their life-long ministry, what vast resources they had in Himself. "Give ye them to eat," He was indeed saying to those men, not merely of one crowd beside the Lake, but of hungry nations ranged rank on rank from Jerusalem and Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. *He is laying upon the Church the responsibility for the world.* Is He not saying it to His servants still? And does He not still multiply His provision and satisfy His poor with bread? Has not His Church discovered from that day to this how much it takes to keep her life going, and how gloriously adequate her Lord is to the task? Can He take a word culled from Holy Writ in a morning moment, and multiply it into provision for a day's pilgrimage? Can He take a message spoken on Sunday and enlarge it till a heart that hears it is for a whole week satisfied and singing? Can He take the poor powers of His servants, and multiply them, by adding to them Himself, till they accomplish things at which they themselves are astonished? These things happen. John Bunyan wrote thus of one of his books: "I did carry my meditations to the Lord Jesus for a blessing, which He did forthwith grant according to His grace; and helping me to set before my brethren, we did all eat and were well-refreshed, and behold also that while I was in the distributing of it, it so increased in my hand, that

He Blessed and Brake

of the fragments that we left, after we had well Luke ix. dined, I gathered up this basketful." ¹ These 10-17. things happen. And when they happen we see again the authentic gesture of the Galilean fields. Once more He blesses the bread, and it is spring-time. He breaks it, and it is harvest.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

This miracle of plenty was once performed that we may know that there is bread and to spare with God; and only once—that we may learn that this is not a world for happiness but for holiness.

W. W. Peyton

¹ Brown's *John Bunyan*, p. 171.

XXXIII

THE CHRIST AND HIS CROSS

“And it came to pass, as He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him : and He asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am ? They answering said, John the Baptist ; but some say, Elias ; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. He said unto them, But Whom say ye that I am ? Peter answering said, The Christ of God. And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing ; Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it : but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away ? For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.”—LUKE ix. 18-27.

**Luke ix.
18-27.**

**The
Surprise of
a Word.**

WE have been watching at one point and another the unfolding of a Personality, and have been amazed at the power, the majesty and the resources of One Who, though He came from eternity, was yet clothed in our clay. After these things and this revelation, we come in this passage upon a word which brings with it a surprise of a different

The Christ and His Cross

and opposite kind. It is the word "must" (v. 22). Luke ix. That word does not surprise us when we have to 18-27. use it of ourselves—our free-will is limited: we are continually bowing to necessity—but as for our Lord and Master, the well-beloved Son of the Father, the King of Men, we should expect Him to live a life free from all constraint, and to submit to no inexorable laws. Yet apparently God's appointment for Him was different from our expectations, and this word *must* was upon His lips again and again. "I *must* be about My Father's business. . . . I *must* preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also. . . . I *must* walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following. . . . I *must* work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day. . . . This that is written *must* be accomplished." And here He broke to His disciples His own knowledge of the gravest necessity of all: "the Son of Man *must* suffer many things . . . and be slain." We misread the word if we think of any merely external compulsion: this was the *must* of a moral necessity, the *must* of a surrendered life, the *must* of a shouldered burden not to be laid down till every step had been taken of the appointed way. But how near the word seems to bring Him to us! It makes Him very human, though no less divine.

We get the essence of this passage if we set this necessity in the frame provided by two other things—one which came immediately before and one which followed immediately after.

1. What had gone before was the Confession of

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
18-27.
The Great
Confession.

Him as the Christ. St Luke is strangely brief in telling us of this. He omits all reference to Caesarea Philippi, and to our Lord's commendation of Peter for his flash of heaven-taught insight, and to the Rock on which the Church should be built. Yet even Luke's brief summary of an immortal hour cannot quite conceal the note of eagerness in the Master's voice. It happened in one of the moments of prayerful retreat which this Evangelist delights to chronicle. He asked them first as to the views of the populace on His own person and work. And then His next question begins with an emphatic pronoun. "But *ye*—whom say ye that I am?" The consciousness of who and what He was had been surging high in His own heart: He wanted to know whether it had begun to rise at all in the hearts of these men, His chosen disciples, or whether His teaching by word and act and character had been altogether in vain.

Divinity and
Service.

He not only received His answer as St Luke tells us, but, as St Matthew shows, an answer which pleased Him to the point of passionate thanksgiving. Is it, then, an anti-climax to descend from that lofty view of Himself and His mission to this grim *must* of sacrificial necessity? It is rather a climax, an enlargement of the thought, an extension of the view. We shall not be far from the truth if we say that the very Divinity which was in Him found full expression in the Cross: perhaps the call of Divinity in Him was to redemptive suffering even more than to anything else. There is a parallel sequence of thought in the

The Christ and His Cross

Fourth Gospel: it may be set beside the present **Luke ix.** passage as an interpretation. It is from the **18-27.**

story of the Upper Room (St John xiii. 3-5).

“Jesus, *knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God and went to God*”: there as here there is the consciousness of a transcendent character and mission.

“He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself: after that, He poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” It seemed as though the very Divinity that was in Him must find expression in lowly service, or else be frustrated of its chief desire. Perhaps when our dim eyes penetrate to the ultimate secrets of theology, we shall learn that the only Christ Whom God could send was a Christ Who was willing to serve and suffer: and the highway He took, which began in the free spaces beyond the stars, was more and more hemmed in by walls of necessity which led, not His feet only but His heart as well—straight to Jerusalem.

2. Yet the necessity that was laid upon Him was prophetic of a like obligation for the consciences of His disciples. If He was strict with Himself, it gave Him all the more right to be stern with them. And the *must* which so fascinates us throws its shadow across the following words, and across the life of those who shall count themselves Christ’s disciples to the end of time. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Again St Luke is very brief: he omits Simon Peter’s remonstrance and

**Thy Daily
Cross.**

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
18-27.

the Lord's rebuke ; but he inserts an extra word which we do not find elsewhere, the word *daily*. It is a word with a very practical sound ; the claim is not for exceptional and occasional heroism, but for a life which in its commonest hours, its regular routine, shall be surrendered and sacrificial. The cross as an instrument of torture and death was already all too familiar in the Roman world. Indeed it is quite possible that the phrase "take up the cross" may already have had proverbial familiarity and force. A man carrying a cross was obviously a man on his way to die, a man about to be made a sacrifice, a man who was beyond the point at which his own will had anything to do with shaping his path or his destiny. And our Lord wanted His disciples to take the sacrificial principle as the guide of their living : that they could truly live only if they truly died—that was the stern and searching lesson which He wanted them to translate into daily obedience.

A Life
well Lost.

There was nothing arbitrary in this : we usually find that even our Lord's harshest or most startling sayings are deeply grounded in the nature of things. The idea grows immediately from a personal challenge to a general law of the moral and spiritual kingdom. "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, but whosoever will lose his life the same shall save it." It is a paradox startling in its intensity, and yet it enshrines a discovery made by everyone who tries to live the moral life with any earnestness at all. He finds out that there are two wills in the universe, his own and God's.

The Christ and His Cross

It is his fate to have to solve the puzzle of the **Luke ix.** relation of these two wills. If he maintain his own **18-27.** will against the will of the Highest, undedicated, unsundered, he has passed his cross, he has saved himself—and lost himself. If his will is given up to the will of God in true self-dedication, so that his will dies and God's will is his will, then he has taken up his cross. He has lost himself—and saved himself: that way lies his true completeness and joy: he is on his way to his crown. To save oneself—from God!—there is no profit in that transaction: to be left to the burden of an unsundered will,—even the whole world would be poor compensation for such a fate. So the Master saw it—God cleanse our eyes, that we may see it in His light!

He does not leave this stern path unilluminated **Warning and Hope.** by gleams of warning and of hope. There is a ruddy glow of warning from the Last Assize when the Son of Man shall stand not in weakness but in power, true to the truth of things, loyal to those who have been loyal, ashamed of those who have been ashamed to confess Him (v. 26). And there is a promise (v. 27) which seems to hint to faithful hearts a nearer gladness than that: "There be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God." Different interpretations have been given of this saying: it has been interpreted of the Transfiguration, of the Destruction of Jerusalem with its final liberation of the new economy from the shackles of the old, and of Pentecost. The last seems the likeliest

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
18-27.

interpretation, and we can believe that the Master filled up the bare promise with gracious explanations, and told them that the Royal Way of the Cross was not to be all sacrifice and sorrow, but would have its springtides of promise, its harvests of joy, when narrow ways would become wealthy places, and crosses turn to crowns. Yet at best the Way of the Cross is a hard way and a high way, and it would be a very lonely way save for Him Who is King and Companion in one. He who takes up the cross separates himself from the great, easy-going, selfish world. Often he separates himself even from his nearest and dearest. Yet he is drawn thereby nearer to his Lord, Who bore the cross for him long ago, and Who will bear it with him to the end.

“The Royal road with mist is white,
Below lies earth and its delight,
No song of land or sob of sea
To break the deep tranquillity,
Whose very stillness brings affright. . . .
My soul is saddened in despite
Of faith and promises: then bright
Descends from heaven's grey canopy
A Hand once marred on Calvary,
And guides my feet to mount aright
The Royal Road.”

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

I see the Cross is tied with Christ's hand to the end of an honest profession: we are but fools to endeavour to loose Christ's knot.

Samuel Rutherford

XXXIV

THE EXCELLENT GLORY

“ And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias : Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with Him were heavy with sleep : and when they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him. And it came to pass, as they departed from Him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here : and let us make three tabernacles ; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias : not knowing what he said. While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them : and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son : hear Him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.”—LUKE ix. 28-36.

THE Transfiguration is a mystery when we come **Luke ix.** to it : it remains a mystery when we leave it. But **28-36.** it is good for us to look sometimes at things which **An Exceed-** do not fit into normal standards : the world is **ing Mystery.** a richer place because there are facts which elude definition, wreaths of mist upon the mountains, unfathomable spaces between the stars. Meantime we may hold in our hands the thread which has

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke ix.
28-36.**

often guided us already : we may watch once more the unveiling of a Personality. "This is My Son, My Chosen¹: hear ye Him": if we miss that, we miss all.

**When He
prayed.**

1. It all began when "He took Peter and John and James"—the three who were nearest to Him in understanding and in sympathy—"and went up into a mountain to pray." It all happened "as He prayed." St Luke's Gospel is full of the things that happened when Jesus prayed. When Jesus was praying, the heavens opened and the Holy Dove came down (iii. 21); Jesus was praying before He chose the Twelve (vi. 12), and before He gave His disciples their first lesson on the Cross (ix. 18); as if He dared not face any difficult task except with this preparation and in this strength. When Jesus was praying, the hearts of His own were stirred to holy envy, and they asked for initiation into His secret (xi. 1). When He prayed in the Garden of His Agony, help came down (xxii. 43), and here, when He was praying on the Holy Mount, He was transfigured. We are grateful to St Luke for recording these things: they are footprints marking the way to a mountain-top that is accessible from all lands and all ages.

**Tabor and
Calvary.**

2. "And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening." Now this was undoubtedly a sign to all watching eyes, the eyes of the three who for the moment were near, the eyes of an illimitable multitude who still watch that scene

¹ This is the true reading of v. 35.

The Excellent Glory

from the slopes of later history. Yet perhaps we **Luke ix.** gather the deepest meaning of the incident if we **28-36.** take it, not as first and foremost a sign to the disciples, but rather as an encouragement to Christ's own heart. Great expositors have found this very central in it. It was, says Dr A. B. Bruce, "an aid to His faith and patience." It was, says Dr George Macdonald, "the Divine defiance of the coming darkness." Did He not need such a sign and encouragement and did He not need it then? Madame Guyon tells of a dream she had upon a certain Festival of the Transfiguration. She saw some of her friends "looking with much admiration at the heaven. They cried out that the heaven was open. They begged me to come, that they saw Tabor, and the heaven opened. I told them I did not wish to go there; that Tabor was not for me; that I needed only Calvary." There is a note of wilful asceticism about that, and of the love of suffering for its own sake, to which our Lord gives no sanction. Even if He is hastening to His Calvary, that does not imply that He does not need Tabor¹: indeed He may need it all the more.

3. For He was like His brethren in needing **His** sometimes God's gifts of strength and of good **Exodus.** cheer. At this period there must have been special temptations in the direction of doubt and fear. It is easy to discover what subject was uppermost

¹ The use of this phrase does not imply any verdict on the unsettled problem as to the exact locality of the "mountain," —Tabor, Hermon, or another.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix. in His mind—it was His coming passion. He
28-36. had been telling His disciples about it, as we have seen, not much more than a week before this (v. 22). He was going to allude to it soon again (v. 44). And on this illuminated summit, the talk was of His “Exodus” which He should accomplish at Jerusalem (v. 31). We may thank the Evangelist for that picturesque and historic word. There are words that carry within them a whole landscape, and sum up a whole historical situation. We are sometimes told that a man has crossed the Rubicon. The Rubicon was a little stream in northern Italy, so small that now it cannot be identified. But it was a boundary, and when Caesar and his army crossed it, a great civil war began. This word *Exodus* has even more history and scenery inside it than that word *Rubicon*. Exodus! It spoke of enemies pressing hard upon the servants of God; of a path which led down into the depth of the mighty waters, of a transcendent victory and enemies left behind for ever. All these things are in this word Exodus when we read it with the historical imagination awake—the roll of Pharaoh’s chariot-wheels, the pain and strain of tremendous hours, the flying spray of the wind-driven waves, and then those timbrels of victory, those songs of praise! His Exodus!—He too was facing the ordeal of His last and greatest peril: He too was going down into the midst of the waves and the billows: and He too perhaps needed to be reminded of the glory and the peace that lay waiting on the other side. Perhaps His prayers on the mountain

The Excellent Glory

were already approximating to the prayer of Luke ix. Gethsemane, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt." And His transfiguration was His final encouragement for His immeasurable task, a sweet and strengthening foretaste of His ultimate joy.

4. It is this reading of the event which seems to put most meaning into the fact that "there talked with Him two men which were Moses and Elias." We have only our imaginations, which we trust may be used not irreverently, to guide us here: we can only ask questions which are not altogether answered. But did they speak to Him of their own experience—of their loneliness and their desolation? Did Moses recall the day when Israel sinned in the wilderness, and he fell on his face before God and said, "If Thou wilt forgive their sin—and, if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written"? Did Elijah tell how once he had stood as Christ was soon to stand, alone amid an unbelieving people, and how it had been shown that he was God's servant, and that he had done all those things at God's word? We do not know. But we may believe that the presence of these elect souls, types of service and suffering, of endurance and triumph, may have had its own measure of comfort for the soul of the Master, as He looked from the mountain-top down the narrow way that led to Calvary.

5. Human nature asserts itself even on a mountain-top, and there was something characteristically Petrine about Peter's sudden and eager

Types of
Suffering
and
Triumph.

Glory,
Fading and
Unfading.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke ix.
28-36.**

suggestion of the three booths—"Master, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles." Did this happen at the Feast of Tabernacles, and did this provide the suggestion for the Apostle's mind? Be that as it may, both Mark and Luke convey very clearly that Peter was not at his best in this proposal: it was the utterance of bewilderment, or of childish and mistaken haste, "not knowing what he said." The world was waiting. The Cross was calling. The cry of sin and sorrow would soon have been heard, however high the mountain or intense the rapture. Perhaps, ere the suggestion came from Peter's lips, the glory was already fading: Dr George Macdonald's fancy is that it "went on paling all the night upon the lonely mount to vanish in the dawn of the new day." But there was another glory that could not fade—the glory that was spoken of in the Voice which came out of the cloud, "This is My Son, My Chosen, hear Him!" After all, the glory of the Transfiguration was only the royal apparel of the King, taken to Him for a moment: His royalty is none the less regal when He doffs His robes of light and takes upon Him the form of a servant.

**Reflecting
the Glory.**

We want to challenge the grassy slopes of Tabor, or the rocky spurs of Hermon, and ask them why they have not kept some shining footprints to mark the place where heaven and earth so strangely met. They keep their secret well. Yet a miracle continues which is bound to no locality. "We all . . . reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord,

The Excellent Glory

are transformed into the same image from glory to **Luke ix.** glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit " (2 Cor. 28-36. iii. 18, R.V.). *The transfiguration of the Master is over, but the transfiguration of the disciples has begun.* Better than "three poor wind-blown huts" upon a mountain-summit is this transfiguring fellowship which shall never end.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

A habit of prayer, the practice of turning to God and the unseen world, in every season, in every place, in every emergency (let alone its supernatural effect of prevailing with God)—prayer, I say, has what may be called a *natural* effect, in spiritualising and elevating the soul. A man is no longer what he was before: gradually, imperceptibly to himself, he has imbibed a new set of ideas, and become imbued with fresh principles. He is as one coming from Kings' courts, with a grace, a delicacy, a dignity, a propriety, a justness of thought and taste, a clearness and firmness of principle, all his own.

John Henry Newman

XXXV

SOME DEFECTS IN THE DISCIPLES

“ And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met Him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech Thee, look upon my son : for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out ; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him. And I besought Thy disciples to cast him out ; and they could not. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you ? Bring thy son hither. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, He said unto His disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears : for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not : and they feared to ask Him of that saying. Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by Him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in My name receiveth Me : and whosoever shall receive Me receiveth Him that sent Me : for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name ; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not : for he that is not against us is for us.”—LUKE ix. 37-50.

Some Defects in the Disciples

IF we set aside for a moment vv. 43 to 45, the remainder of this section is like a short picture gallery, in which the disciples are painted with their defects and blemishes upon them. It is sometimes said that St Luke spares the disciples—rebukes that are frankly given by other evangelists he omits or softens—but it is scarcely true to say that he entirely spares. If he wished to spare them he would not tell us all that he includes here. The story of the demoniac boy is often used, as in Raphael's famous painting, as a foil to the Transfiguration: on the mountain-top such excellent glory, at the mountain's very foot so much misery and need! But with unconscious artistry the Evangelist has provided a foil even more complete than that, in a sequence of little scenes in which the defects of the Disciples measure their distance from the Master, and His glory is all the more revealed by their limitations.

1. We first notice how *ineffective* the disciples could sometimes be. St Luke is much more succinct and abbreviated than St Mark in his account of the incident of the demoniac boy. His special contribution is limited to two small points of detail—the first that it happened on the “next day” after the Transfiguration, and the second his characteristic use of technically medical language in v. 39. Yet even in his shortened form of the story he gives enough to bring out the pathos of the case—the father's cry for an only child, the terror and tragedy of the cruel malady that had laid hold on the boy, and the disappointment

Ineffective
Service.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
37-50.

caused by the ineffectiveness of the disciples: "I besought Thy disciples to cast him out and they could not." Was it the general atmosphere of incredulity or listless despair, produced by this ineffectiveness, that wrung from the heart of Christ that cry, as of weariness holding out against great odds?—"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you?" But, however ineffective the disciples might be, the Master had not lost His power, or shall we rather say His power to draw upon His Father's power? For when the story of the cure is complete, the Evangelist adds this curious comment: "they were all astonished at the *majesty of God*." God's majesty and His tenderness are never far apart, and they were not far apart here, for when Jesus had healed the boy, He "delivered him again to his father"—a gracious touch which reminds us of the parallel phrase in the story of the Raising of the Widow's Son (vii. 15). Little souls on little pedestals may be very harsh and thoughtless: recognise the Supreme Majesty by its union of power and tenderness.

They could
not.

As we have once and again seen, these Gospel incidents have a way of turning into parables for all time: and when the labours of the Church have been ineffective, both her friends and her enemies have remembered this incident of the demoniac boy—it is so like many later experiences. "They could not." Dr T. R. Glover¹ has a criticism of the great Stoic Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, in

¹ *Conflict of Religions in the Roman Empire*, p. 200.

Some Defects in the Disciples

these words: "He worked, he ruled, he endowed, **Luke ix.** he fought: he was pure, he was conscientious, he **37-50.** was unselfish; but he did not believe, and he was ineffectual." The words might stand for the portrait of some of the servants of Christ. Ineffectual!—if it be so, why is it so? Can it be that the ancient reason holds? Is it because we have no faith? Is it because we have scarcely learned the alphabet of prayer?

2. Passing to v. 46, we see how *selfishly ambitious* **Selfish Ambition.** the disciples could sometimes be. "Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be the greatest." For the moment the reader blushes for them—blushes for himself if he can imagine himself to have been one of them—tangled in an argument of that quality so soon after the Transfiguration, and in the midst of repeated lessons about the Cross. Yet we are almost grateful to the disciples for their fault, crying as Augustine did in another connection, *Beata culpa!* We are at any rate grateful to the Evangelist for recording their fault, since once more the blemish in the disciples serves as a foil to the glory of the Master. For "Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child and set him by Him"—a living text for an incisive sermon upon the unpretentious spirit, the lowliness that is the truest greatness.

Well might the Master speak about receiving **The Casting out of Disdain.** such a child in His name, for it was His name that wrought this revolution, and that child within His sheltering arm represents the new principles that

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
37-50.

are going to transform the earth. Someone speaks about "the pagan duty of disdain." To the pagan mind disdain, if not a duty, was a custom so universal as to have the force of unwritten law. That contemptuous spirit was characteristic of Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Greek: the insider never merely looked *out*—he always looked *down* when he looked out. Even the Jew, who might have learned some breadth of outlook from the God he worshipped, was about as pagan as anybody else in fulfilling the duty of disdain: and the disciples of Jesus, but for the grace of their Master, might have been on the way to make very good pagans also, with hearts full of disdain for children, and weak folk, and even for one another. The child was taken by Christ and set in their way to stop them. And from that hour to this, there is no legitimate place for pride or contempt or grasping selfishness in the Christian spirit. When we tend to travel in that direction, this child bars the way in the Master's name. The great places in the Kingdom are not for the grasping and the proud. They are for the needy, the humble, the obedient. This new aristocracy have taken out their patent of nobility from the right source: His gentleness has made them great.

Narrow
Intolerance.

3. At v. 49 we learn how *narrowly intolerant* the disciples could sometimes be. One would have thought that when some of the disciples had recently proved themselves so ineffective, all, for the sake of those some, might have refrained from criticism of other people's effective service.

Some Defects in the Disciples

But it was not so, and perhaps it was with a touch **Luke ix.** of misgiving—was it called forth by our Lord's **37-50.** use of the phrase in *My name* (v. 48)?—that John brought a confession to his Lord. "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." The disciples have evidently already "the feeling of a corporation,"¹ and they will not tolerate any rivalry in business even when it is produced by the best of motives. The incident is almost amusing in its exact forecast of the spirit that has so often prevailed in later days: and the Master's word is as abiding as the foolishness that called it forth—"Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." It is impossible to forget the alternative and apparently opposite form of this saying, given later (xi. 23): "He that is not with Me is against Me." The one form seems charitable, and it is meant to be charitable. The other form sounds strict and searching, and it is meant to be strict. The explanation is found in the context. The saying now before us was spoken to the disciples, and was meant to be a criterion for the judgment of *others*. The other saying was used by the Master when He was in contact with critics and opponents, and was meant to lead them to a right judgment of *themselves*. The same paradox appears in the Sermon on the Mount: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee," so severe are we to be with ourselves: "judge not that ye be not judged," so charitable and patient are we

¹ The phrase is Dr John Oman's,

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
37-50.

to be with others. For Christ or against Him—which is it? How do the ranks divide? Others we may view with hope and charity if they show any sign of sincerity of purpose, leaving to the Supreme Judge the final verdict. But with ourselves we must be severe and exact: it is the worst of all spiritual mistakes to be easy-going with our own souls.

Christ's
Solitude and
Patience.

So the defects of the disciples are unveiled before us. We return to v. 44 and watch the Christ, so little helped even by His own, striding on to His passion and His victory. He warns them again of what must be, but they cannot take it in. "They understood not this saying, and it was hid from them that they perceived it not, and they feared to ask Him of that saying." "One of the chief impressions taken from this Gospel," Mr Carpenter says,¹ "is that our Lord lived alone." How could hearts not yet purged from pride and selfishness altogether understand the Lowly and the Loving? Yet they are His disciples, and He will see to their education: His seed is sown in their hearts, and He will ensure its ripening—first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear. Let us adore His patience: it was His patience that perfected defective disciples: it is the same patience that shall present us also faultless before the Throne of God.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

If we call ourselves Christians, it should rather be to condemn ourselves than to approve ourselves.

George Tyrrell

¹ *Christianity according to St Luke*, p. 186.

XXXVI

THE SAMARITAN VILLAGE

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that He should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”—LUKE ix. 51-56.

THE fifty-first verse marks an important stage in Luke ix. this Gospel from the point of view of the textual 51-56. or critical student, for it is the beginning of what Towards has often been called “the Great Interpolation,” Jerusalem. the long section lasting as far as xviii. 14, which is so largely St Luke’s own and St Luke’s only. It is not entirely fresh material—our scholars tell us that about half of it finds parallel in the first Gospel, about a tenth of it in the second. But it contains many of Luke’s most characteristic contributions to the evangelic record: the parable of the Good Samaritan, the parable of the Prodigal Son, the story of Martha and Mary, and so on; we should have been greatly the poorer if he

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
51-56.

had not ventured out on this his special journey of discovery. What sources of independent information he had we do not know. There are signs of an Aramaic document here and there: e.g. in this first paragraph the words, "He sent messengers *before His face*," look like a translation of a typically Hebrew phrase into Greek. There is a curious insistence upon the fact that our Lord was approaching Jerusalem. "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (ix. 51). "His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem" (ix. 53). "He went through the cities and villages, teaching and journeying towards Jerusalem" (xiii. 22, cf. also v. 33). "It came to pass as He went to Jerusalem" (xvii. 11). The geographical indications are vague, and it is not possible to draw a map of the route; but from the Evangelist's standpoint "the Royal Banners forward go"—towards Jerusalem.

The Thorny
Way.

It was, then, even if the way was long and winding, His last journey, and one beginning to read the story of it would wish for Him an easy and pleasant progress: even if the end of it must be the Cross, let the path to it lie through the green pastures! But it was not to be so: He Who had the nails and spear to bear had to bear the pin-pricks first. Yet these smaller matters have their place in the strange discipline of life. It may be in some respects easier to be a martyr at the stake than to be a saint amid the thorns, to shine on some great occasion for which one has braced oneself than to keep a placid heart and a

The Samaritan Village

shining countenance amid the smaller provocations **Luke ix.**
of men and circumstance. It is no small part of **51-56.**
the glory of the Master that He Who was great on
Calvary was also great in Samaria: He Who bore
the cruel nails with uttermost submission and
sublimest gentleness was also Himself perfect in
dignity, in wisdom, and in patience when assailed
only with the little poisoned arrows of rudeness
and intolerance.

1. This must have been the native village of **The Town**
old Mr Prejudice, and some of his famous deaf **of Mr**
brigade must have been his neighbours there. **Prejudice.**
Perhaps blindness was endemic as well as deafness.
Was it a fear on our Lord's part as to His reception
which took the precaution of sending messengers
before His face? Perhaps the village had a re-
putation: in Palestine to this day some towns
are notoriously more fanatical than others. In
any case "they did not receive Him": old Mr
Prejudice had obtained some of his military training
in the long feud between Jew and Samaritan:
and he and his men slammed the gate and mounted
the walls. In that village there was no place for
the Son of Man to lay His head. "They did not
receive Him because His face was as though He
would go to Jerusalem."

2. But the intolerance of the Samaritans is not **The Sons of**
the only intolerance in the story: the Intolerance **Thunder.**
of Prejudice is followed very naturally by the
Intolerance of Love. Those two electric per-
sonalities, the Sons of Thunder, voiced what all
must have felt within them, indignation that the

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
51-56.

Master Whom they loved should be treated so ungraciously. "Lord," they said, knowing Him so little after many days in His service, "wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" He turned and rebuked them. Unfortunately while the *fact* of the rebuke is undeniable, there is but very weak MS. evidence for the *words* of it as given in the A.V. One would wish to keep the words: they sound authentic: it was like Him to say, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of," and to add, "The Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." Yet our likings are not perhaps entitled to supply what the best MSS. obstinately leave out, and we must content ourselves with the likelihood that, since there was a rebuke, it must have taken some such shape as this. They certainly did not share His spirit, or understand His purpose when they spoke like that.

A wise historian of the Scottish Church drily remarks: "From the beginning of the world men clearly saw that it was wrong for others to persecute them: it is scarcely two hundred years since they began dimly to see that it was wrong for them to persecute others." The disciples at this stage had not quite risen to the second part of that lesson. Yet, after all, their intolerance had one good point in being the intolerance of love, and it was the expression, though mistaken in its form, of a holy passion within them which was yet going to be very fruitful for the healing and helping of the world.

* G. Milton:

"Though all the winds of doctrine were let
loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the
field, we do injuriously to misdoubt her strength

The Samaritan Village

3. Is it not the perfect tolerance that we see here **Luke ix.**
in the Master Himself? He took no share in the **51-56.**
anger of His disciples though it was He Who had **The Perfect**
most right to be angry. One seems to feel the **Tolerance.**
gracious, restraining influence of His Personality
in the dignity and reserve of the phrase: "they
went to another village." Two things made His
great patience and tolerance possible.

One was His *humility*. There was nothing in
Him for intolerance to nourish itself upon: there
was nothing in Him for revengefulness to take
hold of with its evil roots: "I am meek and
lowly in heart." In much human intolerance pride
is very greatly to blame—wounded pride, pride
therefore grown revengeful, pride even grown hypo-
critical, persuading itself that it is all aflame for
righteousness. "Let this mind be in you which was
also in Christ Jesus," the true tolerance according
to the true pattern, which is Incarnate Humility.

The other was His *faith in the victory of truth*.
Often our human intolerance is only a form of
impatience or of unbelief: if men really believed
in the power of truth to win its way, they would
not take the axe or kindle the faggot. Did our
Lord have dreams of a day when His disciples
would come back to this very region, preaching a
Gospel of Reconciliation and calling for no fire
except the Spirit's dower of light and love? We
do not know: but He had faith in His own Kingdom
and its prospects. And perhaps He could bear to
be shut out of a village, knowing that being lifted
up upon a Cross, He was to draw a world.

*Truth put to the world in a free and open
encounter? for who knows not that Truth is strong
next to the Almighty? she needs no policies nor
stratagems to make her victorious. Give her*

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix. Jeremy Taylor closes the *Liberty of Prophesying*
51-56. with the legend of an old man, with the snows of a
The Patience hundred winters upon him, who came to Abraham's
Divine. tent and asked for shelter. Abraham received
him with kindness, until he discovered that the old
man was a fire worshipper. Then with anger he
thrust him forth into the night. But God called
Abraham and said to him, "Where is the man?"
And Abraham answered, "I thrust him out because
he doth not worship Thee." But God spoke again
and said, "I have suffered him for a hundred years :
couldst thou not bear with him one night?"
Whereupon Abraham went after the old man,
and brought him back, and gave him food, and
instruction also. To which the golden Jeremy
adds the counsel : "Go and do thou likewise, and
the God of Abraham shall reward thy charity."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Those who live in fellowship with Christ will learn a calm tolerance, a hopeful tenderness for everything except sin. . . . Intolerance is the child of self-assertion. It is because *our* beliefs or *our* accredited forms are not accepted that the grievance comes. When self is ruled out of the life by the love of Christ, the greater part of intolerance will depart with it.

Mary Raleigh

XXXVII

ASPIRANTS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

“And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto Him, Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head. And He said unto another, Follow Me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow Thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—LUKE ix. 57-62.

WE have seen our Lord at an earlier stage gathering **Luke ix.** His disciples round Him and choosing His apostles. **57-62.**

Now we watch His handling of some aspirants **Brothers of Mr Pliable.** for discipleship. Whether their will to serve Him proved permanent or not, we do not know: St Luke is silent about that, so is St Matthew who deals with two of the three cases given here. The natural inference is that there were no further developments: they turned back because of the hardness of the way.

Modern psychology tells us that there are two types of human will—the *precipitate* type, eager, active, impetuous; and the *obstructed* type, cautious, irresolute, entangled. If that distinction holds,

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
57-62.

The
Sanguine
Tempera-
ment.

then the first of the three men whom we see in this passage belongs to the first type, the other two to the second.

1. As our Lord and His company walked along the highway, a man came up to Him and said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." Matthew tells us that the man was a Scribe, and uses the curious phrase, "A single Scribe," as if he remembered the approach of the solitary figure. There was a fine recklessness about this "Whithersoever." Here was an enthusiastic, impulsive type of character. Here was the sanguine temperament which did not dream of obstacles, and did not see afar off the shadow of the Cross upon the Hill. Whatever came of this most hopeful offer, it drew from our Lord this most characteristic and revealing sentence: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have roosting-places,¹ but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." The words are not to be understood as containing any note of complaint: they may even have been spoken with a smile. But having been spoken, they stand for ever as the supreme expression of the triumph of true greatness over circumstance. This Jesus may be poor, so poor that He may sometimes envy those friends of His, the beasts and birds, their quiet resting-places. But He is the Son of Man, and that glory no poverty can obscure: though He wore an imperial crown, that calling could not be more splendid.

¹ The Greek word does not mean "nests." Lit. "lodging-places," "encampments."

Aspirants for Discipleship

But the immediate purpose of the words lay Luke ix. chiefly in the merciful severity which would point 57-62. out to the eager aspirant the cost of his allegiance. The warning of Love. He too might make himself an outsider from his own people, who was now a respectable citizen of the professional classes: was he sure that his resolution was robust enough for this? It is apparent enough from this Gospel alone¹ that our Lord was ready to deal surgically with mere sentimentality or ill-considered enthusiasm. And as His servants have followed Him down the ages in the task of winning men, they again and again have had to practise the same loving severity. Miss Wilson-Carmichael tells of a soul in modern India,² a Hindu woman whose caste customs were bound up with the worship of Siva. She wanted to know what was involved in following Jesus. Her teacher tried to persuade her to postpone the problem, "telling her that if she believed what we told her of Jesus our Lord, she would soon know Him well enough to ask Him direct what she wanted to know, and He Himself would explain to her all that it meant to follow Him." But "she would not consent to be led gently on. 'No, I must know it now,' she said; and as verse by verse we read to her, her face settled sorrowfully. 'So far must I follow, so far?' she said, 'I cannot follow so far.'" And after days and months of teaching that was still her cry, "I cannot break my caste: *I cannot follow so far.*" It was easy

¹ e.g. ix. 23; xi. 27; xiii. 23; xiv. 15.

Things as They Are, p. 75.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
57-62.

in our Lord's day, and it is easy still, to utter a "Whithersoever": it is another thing to confront all that is involved in it, and to find faith and courage to carry it out. Did this Scribe follow when he knew the journey was so far?

The
Inhibited
Type.

2. The other two candidates for discipleship were evidently of a more obstructed or hesitant type. The first of them answered the Master's challenge with the request, "Suffer me first to go and bury my father." At first sight, the reply of Christ seems harsh, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of God" (R.V.). If the man's father was dying, was not his place beside his father's pillow? if he were already dead, was not family sorrow itself the call of God? But that is too easy an interpretation. If the father were already dying, the son would not have been attending the open-air ministry of Jesus. If he were already dead, the burial, according to the swift method of hot countries, would have been over in a few hours. Wendt, in his book on *The Teaching of Jesus*, gives the clue in a story from Palestine of a missionary who urged a young Syrian to take a tour in Europe to complete his education. The lad answered, "I must first bury my father," not meaning that his father was ill or dying, but merely that meantime home duties came first. And in the ancient case, as in the modern, the phrase meant this—that the younger generation did not feel free to take independent action so long as the older generation survived. No wonder our Lord spoke in an

Aspirants for Discipleship

imperative way, having a baptism to be baptised **Luke ix.** with, and feeling increasingly upon His soul the **57-62.** urgency of the passing years and of human need. No man was worth anything to Him who was not prepared to seek first the Kingdom. And His clear eyes saw in the households of Galilee the dead and the living—the dead who were unresponsive to God's purpose, and the living who were alive to work His will.

The other aspirant belonged to the same spiritual class. "Lord, I will follow Thee, *but*"—there is much moral and psychological meaning in that "but": there are wills so obstructed and entangled by *buts* that they will never nerve themselves to any great endeavour—"but let me first go bid them farewell which are at my house." Perhaps he had in his mind the story of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings xix. 20). But our Lord, already seeing His would-be disciple caught in a net of fond arms and soft entreaties, answered with another emphatic and immortal saying. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God." That furrow of loyalty may have to be driven not only across a man's own convenience but across the prejudices, protests, fears of others, even of his nearest and dearest. It may stretch, as it did for the Hindu woman, so far that the heart fails at the thought of following to the end. But before the majesty and the authority of the call of Christ all other calls and interests fade and fail. It was a part of His work in the world that, just as He had sometimes to

The Plough
and the
Furrow.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke ix.
57-62.

caution impetuous persons to count the cost, so also He had sometimes to strengthen hesitant wills, caught in the snare of conventionality, He had to urge them to break out and to plough through. Their deliverance lay in their defiance, and their salvation in a surrender so absolute that no other authority dared bid them halt upon their way.

How far ?

Great was His confidence in Himself when He dared to deal with men after this fashion ! Great was His confidence not only in His authority to command but in His power to satisfy, when He stood over against the most binding ties, the most tender affections, and said, *Follow Me*. How far shall we follow ? The call to follow to prison and to death may never come to us ; but as far as the will to go with Him everywhere He leads, at whatever cost to comfort or convenience or popularity or outward peace, so far must we follow. So far also as to wear out the years, and keep the flag flying till the last fight and the last victory. If He is worth following, He is worth following to the end. O living hearts, that want to stand with the living and not with the dead, ye must follow—*so far !*

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Following of Me is not like following of some other master. The wind sits always on My face, and the foaming rage of the sea of this world, and the proud and lofty waves thereof, do

Aspirants for Discipleship

continually beat upon the sides of the bark Luke ix.
that Myself, My cause, and My followers are 57-62.
in : he therefore that will not run hazards, and
that is afraid to venture a drowning, let him not
set foot in this vessel.

John Bunyan

XXXVIII

MORE LABOURERS FOR THE HARVEST

“After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few : pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. Go your ways : behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes : and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it : if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give : for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you : And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you : notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be

More Labourers for the Harvest

thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me."—LUKE x. 1-16.

THE story of the Mission of the Seventy is given in Luke x. this Gospel alone: and there has been a tendency 1-16. to cast doubt upon its historical reality—partly The Twelve and the Seventy. because of the absence of other documentary evidence and partly because there is a certain amount of identity between the instructions given to the Twelve and those recorded here as given to the Seventy. But there are other considerations which criticism of this type ignores or underestimates. We are now upon St Luke's special track where he gives us much which he alone has discovered: the solitude of his witness, if it were allowed to cancel this section, would cancel much more besides. Further, we learn from St Matt. ix. 38, which is also quoted here (x. 2) that our Lord, as Dr A. B. Bruce puts it, was "on the outlook for competent assistants": if He found some, and if He used them, it is not surprising. Still further, it is evident from such passages as Acts i. 15 and 1 Cor. xv. 6 that a fellowship much larger than that of the Twelve was closely linked with our Lord.

Where they went we are not told; only the Where and general indication is given: "He sent them two Who? and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come." Who they were we know not: there is an old tradition that "Philip the Evangelist" was one of them. They seem to have represented an emergency measure, not a permanent piece of machinery. They made their

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
1-16.

The
Master's
Hope.

pilgrimage: they gave their witness: they faded from history. But nothing of their work was lost: it was built into the foundations of the Spiritual City.

1. The passage gives us a glimpse into the mind of Christ when He sent them out: He had a vision (v. 2) of a great harvest waiting to be reaped, and therefore of an urgent need. The very idea of a harvest implies Christ's faith in the "spiritual susceptibility"¹ of men. He had His own sadnesses and disappointments, face to face as He continually was with a "faithless and perverse generation." Yet the word "harvest" implies a surviving optimism: He believed in the latent soul of humanity, waiting to be quickened, nurtured, developed, so that its treasures might be brought to the feet of God. But with this hopefulness there was intertwined a sense of urgency. It is a strangely strong word that is here employed: "Pray ye the Lord of the Harvest that He would *thrust forth* labourers into His harvest." The prophets, in their vivid, anthropomorphic way had spoken of God "making bare His arm": here is a figure equally full of energy, urgency, divine impatience, as of a hand put out to speed the laggards and make everyone understand that the King's business required haste. He felt that thrusting Hand upon His own soul—felt it increasingly as the days sped past and the greatness of the task revealed itself; and He would have these His servants feel it also.

2. As regards the detailed counsels to His

¹ The phrase is Dr Bruce's.

More Labourers for the Harvest

ambassadors, it is not needful to dwell on those **Luke x.** which merely reflect the counsels to the Twelve **1-16.** already discussed, and which are all a parable of detachment and of concentration upon one supreme end. Hopeful though the Master's outlook was, His was not a shallow optimism which took no account of facts: hard times lay ahead of them, "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves." But they on their part must be careful to stir no needless offence. Peace must be in all their words and works and ways. "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace to this house (the common *salaam* of the East), and if a son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it; if not, your *salaam* will come back to you." This is Dr T. R. Glover's rendering, which he follows with a comment on the beauty of the idea, "that the unheeded *Peace* comes back and blesses the heart that wished it, as if courteous and kind words never went unrewarded." There must be a simple acceptance of hospitality with no discourteous fault-finding or restless search for something better: "Go not from house to house: and into whatsoever city ye enter and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you." Here again, as in the case of the Twelve, we learn of the Sacrament of Failure (v. 10)—the solemn and awful sign that the messengers of Christ are clear from the blood of those who have refused to listen, but that their mission abides for judgment if not for salvation: "Notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." Strange

Peace to
Open Hearts.

No Peace
for Shut
Gates.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke x.
1-16.** that little squalid towns should shut their gates upon the Eternal Splendours which all their prophets had taught them to expect; strange that mud-hovels should be too proud to receive a King's heralds. "From all blindness of heart . . . Good Lord, deliver us."

**Blind Com-
mercialism.**

3. The "Woes" that follow, pronounced upon Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, are differently, though somewhat vaguely, set by St Matthew. Whether we are to assume that the Mission of the Seventy included these cities we do not know. In the heart of populous Galilee, they were probably prosperous business cities; and the mention of them reminds us that our Lord's ministry lay between two types of hostility—the ecclesiastical hostility that came from Jerusalem, and the more commercialised and materialistic hostility of centres like these. To remember this gives point to the comparison with Tyre and Sidon, wealthy and powerful cities of ancient days, whose godless materialism had not availed them in the day of their calamity.¹ Not once or twice in history has it been apparent that the merely mercantile man has lost his true fortune in attempting to save it: the very biggest things in the universe are not built along his lines at all. It was to prosperous Jews, opening up businesses in Babylon, and letting all their idealisms fade, that the voice of the prophet came long ago: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord." And when Christ and His

¹ See e.g. Ezek. xxvii.

More Labourers for the Harvest

messengers opened Poor Man's Market at the gates of cities like Chorazin and Bethsaida, the opportunity, and the tragedy, repeated itself: there was the same absorption in the tangible, there was the same scorn for wares which could be had without money and without price: and as the redeeming Footsteps passed upon their way,—“lingering footsteps slow to pass,”—there was the same settling down of the shadow of judgment upon another group of human souls who did not know the day of their visitation.

4. The last impression we receive is of the majesty of Him Who stands behind the mission and the messengers, Who is Himself the Lord of the messengers, and the Occasion and Theme of the message. Is there any clearer revelation of our Lord's self-consciousness, His way of thinking and feeling about Himself, than this 16th verse? “He that heareth you heareth Me: he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me.” The catholic doctrine of our Lord's person is not a product of the Fourth Gospel, nor is it perilously poised on an odd text or two: it is the reflection of His whole view of Himself, and, as here, flashes out upon us from many settings and occasions. When Christ is shut out, how great is the Guest Who is excluded! When He is welcomed, how divine is the Friend Who enters in! Is not this the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses and of Juda and Simon? Can we not see Him trudging along the road like any common pilgrim? Yet

The Great Guest.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
1-16.

He claims to possess and to bestow the clue to ultimate Reality. He knocks, either in His own person, or in the person of one of His messengers, at some door in Capernaum, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Jerusalem. It is hospitably and generously opened; and lo! there enters not a tired wayfarer only, but in Him and behind Him, the God of all the worlds. It is a tremendous claim. But what if it be true?

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The Destiny of the Little Flock:

A New Testament Sequence

(i.)

Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.—*St Luke* x. 3.

(ii.)

Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.—*St Luke* xii. 32.

(iii.)

As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.—*Romans* viii. 36.

(iv.)

The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.—*Revelation* vii. 17 (R.V.).

XXXIX

THE GLORY OF A TIME

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven. In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in Thy sight. All things are delivered to Me of My Father: and no man knoweth Who the Son is, but the Father; and Who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. And He turned him unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—LUKE x. 17-24.

THIS passage is full of the glory of a time. And Luke x. ere it is ended our Lord reveals His anxiety lest 17-24. His disciples should miss the significance of the days in which they were living. Sometimes the last people to see the glory of a time may be those who are living through it. We see from afar the glory of those Galilean years.

The
Deceiving
Present.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
17-24.

“Oh to have watched Thee through the vineyards
wander,
Pluck the ripe ears and into evening roam,—
Followed and known that in the twilight yonder
Legions of angels shone about Thy home!”

And we forget that to most men, when the Master lived, the sunsets were no more splendid than usual, and the legions of angels were hid from mortal vision. We sometimes speak of the deceptiveness of the mists of time, and try to make allowance for these, when we are studying remote history. But the atmosphere of the present is even more deceptive, and the glory of the greatest persons and the greatest events is apt to be hidden from those who are nearest to them. “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see,” our Lord said to His disciples. He had no doubt that those years of His life and ministry were the climax of the travail of ages, the dawning of the day of promise, and He dreaded lest His disciples should not realise the greatness of the hour. There are moments when

“Earth’s crammed with heaven
And every common bush afire with God.
But only he who sees takes off his shoes,—
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.”

and even the most unique revelation may be made commonplace by common-place minds.

The Joy
of Success.

1. The seventy, at any rate, when they returned from their mission had no doubt that great things were happening. They had enjoyed success beyond their reckoning: “Lord, even the devils are subject

The Glory of a Time

unto us through Thy name." And at their brave **Luke x.** report the heart of Christ leaped within Him; **17-24.** and, even as at Samaria He saw fields white already to harvest, so here He saw Satan's throne empty and his kingdom broken. From strength to strength these His servants should go on; treading on the serpent's head and immune from his sting, they should turn the world into Paradise Regained.

Was there any joy greater than the joy of those early adventurers for Christ? There was a joy still more fundamental, without which even the joy of mighty works was no joy at all. It was apparently an accepted doctrine of the Christian scheme of thought that exorcisms were no necessary criterion of the character or standing of those who wrought them: a man might even do many wonderful works and yet himself be a castaway. So not without a note of warning in His voice, He recalls these eager workers, perhaps just a little proud of their great doings, to this fundamental joy, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." That is a favourite New Testament phrase to describe those whose position is as sure as Divine grace, working upon willing hearts, can make it: "the General Assembly and Church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven" (**Hebrews xii. 23**), "they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (**Rev. xxi. 17**). In that privilege there is no room for boasting or for pride: they owe it all to God's royal grace. But there is any amount of room for joy. Samuel

The Joy
that goes
Deeper.

St Luke i.—xi.

**Luke x.
17-24.**

Rutherford wrote to John Ewart: "When the time shall come that your eye-strings shall break, your face wax pale, your breath grow cold, and this house of clay shall totter, and your one foot shall be over the march (boundary) in eternity, it shall be your comfort and joy that ye gave your name to Christ." So the Master bade these His servants of long ago to rejoice, not in any pride of achievement or success of service, but rather in this that they had given their names to Him, and that they were indelibly entered in the register of God's remembrance.

**A Portion
for the
Babes.**

2. The joy of the Master answers the gladness of these His servants. "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth." He could not but rejoice when He saw how eager hearts were entering into His Kingdom, and tasting the joy of its service. His thanksgiving was not for the blinding of the wise and prudent but for the enlightenment of the babes, which meant the potential enlightenment of every human soul. Some of the wise and learned were shutting themselves out; but there was not a Pharisee, nor a Rabbi, nor a dusty man of the world who might not by God's help stir up the child within him, and make a new beginning among things divine. Probably there is no finer commentary upon this thanksgiving, in later Christian experience, than the story of Blaise Pascal's fire-baptism, on the night of Monday, November 23, 1654, between half-past ten and half-past twelve. He was renowned even in his

The Glory of a Time

youth as a mathematician and a philosopher: he **Luke x.** was the master of a style lucid, brilliant, satirical: **17-24.** there never was a finer example of the wise of this world, the expert in a scholar's lore. But that night a new spirit came into his life, and long after, when he was dead, a faithful servant found in a pocket inside his doublet a document on which was traced a trembling record of his great experience. He had depicted a flaming Cross, and had scrawled a few broken words and sentences. The word "Fire" stands by itself as the memorial of his personal Pentecost, and then follow the words, "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, *the God not of philosophers and scholars.*" In that great and glowing moment, the wise man became a little child: the learned scholar saw that the God of the simple was the God of his salvation. When souls reach that point, in ancient Palestine or in the modern world, they cannot be kept out of their promised land. They enter heaven while the wise men are debating whether there be any heaven to enter. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight.

There follows in v. 22 a sentence which has **The Father** often been compared to a boulder from the **and the Son.** Johannine formation stranded here upon Synoptic ground. Every word in it might have come bodily out of the Fourth Gospel, yet it cannot be questioned on grounds of criticism, and it shows us again how even in the earliest and simplest records of Christ's teaching, there is fully, even if briefly, given us what the Fourth Gospel only makes more

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
17-24.

explicit. Both here and in St Matthew it is linked with this thanksgiving. He rejoiced that the Father's arms were round Himself and His work, as surely as they were round the poor and simple souls who hungered for truth and love. And He was sure of the welcome that awaited those trusting hearts, because He Himself so intimately shared His Father's secret, and was a partaker of those Divine thoughts and ways which are often so hard for this dull world to understand.

The Un-
setting Sun.

3. The Master would not let His immediate circle escape from the glory and privilege which surrounded them in that time of visitation. "He turned to His disciples"—was it the seventy or a smaller and more intimate group?—"and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see." They must not let nearness cause blindness. The Master spares a thought of sympathy for the "prophets and kings," or, as St Matthew has it, "prophets and righteous men," who strained the vision of their faith towards these happier days but died not having received the promise. He would have His disciples see, in the light of that long expectation, into how great a heritage they had entered. We too must never forget the glory of that time. It is the time that redeems and transfigures all other times. It is the time that gives us the clue to the plan of the ages. And though every age has its new glories and its fresh discoveries, nothing can antiquate the Son of Man nor render His dateless revelation out of date. To walk in His light is

The Glory of a Time

to have found a sun that goes not down. To see **Luke x.** with open eyes the glory of God in the face of Jesus **17-24.** Christ is to behold what the ages waited for, and what the future can neither rival nor surpass. Times change, but Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAISE

The Foreshadowing and the Fulfilment

The Desire : I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory.—*Ex.* xxxiii. 18.

The Fulfilment : He dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.—*St John* i. 14.

The Hope : Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness.—*Is.* xxxii. 1.

The Fulfilment : My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice.—*St John* xviii. 36, 37.

The Promise : Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.—*Jer.* xxxi. 31.

The Fulfilment : This is My blood of the Covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins.—*St Matt.* xxvi. 28 (R.V.).

XL

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.”—LUKE x. 25-37.

Luke x.
25-37.

It is always difficult to keep controversy from shading off into casuistry. Casuistry is often

Who is my Neighbour?

the refuge of those who are beaten in controversy, **Luke x.**
or who wish to shift their controversial ground. **25-37.**
A case in point is before us. "A certain Scribe **Controversy**
stood up"—did the incident occur in a synagogue? **and**
—"and tempted Him, saying, Master, what shall I **Casuistry.**
do to inherit eternal life?" He was in a debating
mood, this man of legal mind, and hoped for the
pleasure of a verbal conflict, ending perchance
in a dialectical triumph. There was, however,
no need for controversy, as the Master speedily
elicited, for they both, the questioner and the
Questioned, built upon a common foundation:
"thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy
heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy
strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour
as thyself." It was at this point that controversy
turned to casuistry, in the Scribe's further question,
"And who is my neighbour?" But the world
has good reason to bless the moment in which, by
a casuistical question or from any other motive,
this parable was drawn from our Lord. For,
from that day to this, it has been, next to Christ's
own life and example, the greatest lesson ever
taught in simple kindness. If it was meant to
answer in the first instance the evasion of a shallow
heart, it has made a permanent appeal to the
deepest instincts of humanity. We all, as Coventry
Patmore tells us,

"With longing deep,
Love words and actions kind, which are
More good for life than bread or sleep.
More beautiful than Moon or Star"

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
25-37.
The
Unhappy
Pilgrim.

1. The best way to lay bare the lesson is to divide the parable according to its *dramatis personæ*. So, first, we spend a moment in watching the pilgrim whose unhappy case is to provide some of his fellows with their opportunity or their judgment. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves." The touch of geography is unusual in the parables, and enhances the vividness of the picture. It was a notoriously dangerous road, and one that looked as though it were made for rough men and cruel deeds, shaped by nature in her harshest mood and affording to robbers many impenetrable retreats. So there was often borne to the outer world the tale of grim happenings on that highway—happenings as ugly as the splintered rocks that hid them from the eyes of civilisation.

"A certain man," the Master said, taking, as was His wont, a vivid instance to press home His point. Yet it is not hard to see through the individual case the larger need of humanity—humanity suffering, now through man's inhumanity to man, now through the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune; humanity sorrowing, beset by pains and griefs which seldom come singly but hunt, like robbers, in troops. That was what Christ saw as He moved about the world. Those rugged miles from Jerusalem to Jericho are not long enough to measure the highway on which such sights are to be seen. If we could travel that road right down through the ages to our modern day, should we ever be out of sight of such cases? Would

Who is my Neighbour?

the smell of blood be ever out of our nostrils, the cry of despair ever out of our ears? Luke x.
25-37.

2. A notorious pair cast their shadow upon the middle of the story. "By chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side." "And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." Probably we are right in interpreting them as casuists—casuists such as the Scribe who had questioned our Lord was in some danger of becoming. The power of evasion possessed by the human conscience is positively amazing: if we watch ourselves closely amid the affairs of life we shall often catch ourselves among the casuists, unmindful of the proverb, *Qui s'excuse s'accuse*. Mark Rutherford lays bare with surgical skill this tendency of the human mind,¹ illustrating it by this very Priest and Levite. They "assuredly convinced themselves that most likely the swooning wretch was not alive. They were on most important professional errands. *Ought* they to run the risk of entirely upsetting those solemn engagements by incurring the Levitical penalty of contact with a corpse? There was but a mere chance that they could do any good. This person was certainly unknown to them; his life might not be worth saving, for he might be a rascal; and on the other side, there were sacred duties, duties to their God. What Priest or Levite with proper religious instincts could possibly hesitate?" Now if

¹ *Miriam's Schooling*, p. 90.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
25-37.

through the case of this robbed and wounded man we are really looking at suffering and sorrowing humanity, we may here be close to one of the reasons why help often tarries so long. Simple kindness has its hands bound with red tape, its feet clogged and its heart chilled by tradition or by expediency or by some influence which manages to appear moral and respectable. If we ever walk in the track of the Priest and the Levite with a glow of self-approval, we have double need to examine ourselves, lest Satan be enthroned within us as an angel of light, and our laziness or selfishness clothe itself in fine phrases as in a garment.

A Picture
of Gracious
Kindness.

3. Enter the Good Samaritan, and the sunshine with him. "A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him." The Teller of the story was One Who often found precious things in unlikely places, and laid bare the treasures which prejudice had covered up; and it was like Him thus to take a despised name and set it here to shine in splendour. This portrait of gracious kindness is perfect in its completeness. It is a picture of *catholic* charity, which forgets boundaries of race and creed and politics, and looks only on men as men. It is a picture of *self-forgetful* charity, which ignores the instinct of self-preservation in the stronger instinct of compassion, for the Samaritan, be it noted, was himself a wayfarer on the dangerous zone, and might well have deemed it his duty to hurry on towards safety. It is a picture of a *thorough* charity,

Who is my Neighbour?

which is not satisfied to give a momentary gift **Luke x.** but sees the thing through to the end. "He bound **25-37.** up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him"—he could scarcely have been more thorough about it all if the stranger had been one of his own family. Indeed, here is a picture of *economical* charity, thorough in care, yet not spendthrift of resources: "He took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." Perhaps the good man was able to do this thing at all because, when he did it, he did not do it recklessly, but watched his expenditure well, and took care of his pence as well as of his pensioners.

But is this a picture of *modern* charity? Perhaps **Simple** not. The Good Samaritan has learned by ex- **Story—**perience, and the ages have increased his remedies **Eternal** for the sorrow and suffering that he finds by the **Lesson.** wayside. He has a vote now, and can influence the Town Councils of Jerusalem and Jericho to strengthen the police forces, on the principle that prevention is better than cure. Indeed, to bring him quite up to date, we can imagine him, between his calls at the Inn to enquire for his patient, attending a School of Economics to learn something of the causes which make the social struggle such a fierce affair, and some of the principles which might make the world more stable, orderly, and just. The picture is not modern, of course; it is

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke x.
25-37.

a simple story for a simple time. But it gives us something better than what is modern—it gives us an unfading picture of that true spirit of loving-kindness which by the grace of God has wrought in all ages, and without which all the best and most recent machinery will only generate friction. The spirit of the Good Samaritan is the spirit we need in our more complicated social structure, to help us to face our problems with good-will; and all the ages, ancient or modern, have their use for anyone, whatsoever his garb and name, who breaks through the conventions of self-interest and shows us a heart like the heart of God.

Love is Life.

It is important not to forget that the whole matter arose out of a question about eternal life. It looks as though to the mind of the Master selfishness is death, and love is life, and there is no true life except in love.¹ And so this earthly and temporal existence

“With all it yields of joy and woe
And hope and fear. . . .
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love.”

The rugged, sorrow-haunted road from Jerusalem to Jericho, on which we all must walk continually, is a strange place of education, but perhaps there is no other route on which we could learn love so fully. It is a rich and glorious lesson, for God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.

¹ This connection cannot be accidental. Cf. the answer to another enquirer about Eternal Life in Ch. xviii.

Who is my Neighbour?

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke x.

It hath been the ground of a multitude of mistakes in divinity to think that "Do this and live" is only the language of the covenant of works. . . . Christ hath His place and work ; duty hath its place and work too ; set it but in its own place, and expect from it but its own part, and you go right.

Richard Baxter

XLI

A SHORT GUIDE FOR SEEKERS

“And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And He said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins ; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from evil. And He said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves ; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him ? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not : the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone ? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent ? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion ? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children : how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ? ”—LUKE xi. 1-13.

Luke xi. It is impossible in short space to discuss adequately
1-13. the contents of these overflowing verses. But let

A Short Guide for Seekers

us name the paragraph a Short Guide for Seekers, Luke xi. and let us make our way through it by the line 1-13. that is so suggested. There is always something romantic and attractive about a seeker. Ancient stories of pilgrims and explorers do not lose their charm, and those who still dare the arctic ice or the tropic forests, in search of the few goals of travel which are as yet unreached, have the eyes of the world upon them. There is something in our souls which thrills in sympathy with the joy of seeking and with the joy of finding. Not least is this true of those who in all ages have sought for God, "if haply they might feel after Him and find Him." The deepest pathos of our human story lies along the line of that quest, and when the quest is successful there lies at the end of it the deepest joy that the human heart can know. What did our Lord give here to help the hearts of His disciples on this, the supreme quest?

1. He gave them a *form of words*. The occasion was when He was "praying in a certain place": we have already noticed how many things, according to St Luke, happened when Jesus prayed. We learn incidentally that John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray, though no specimen of those prayers is preserved to us. Perhaps the disciples of Jesus were stirred by a feeling that here, in the Master's solitary communion, was something more wonderful than any secret that John ever knew, when one of them brought to Him the request, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." For answer, He gave them what we

The
Romance of
Seeking.

A Prayer
for
Disciples.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
1-13.

are accustomed to call the Lord's Prayer, though we should rather call it the Prayer of the Disciples. St Luke's version is much abbreviated as compared with that of St Matthew: if we omit the words and phrases which have not the best MSS. support, we get the following: "Father, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come; our bread for each day give us daily: and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation." We may leave our scholars to settle the exact question of relationship between the two versions, and the authenticity of this phrase or that: the essence is here in the word *Father*, and in the spirit of reverent and simple trust which the prayer even in its shortened form enshrines.

Familiar
yet Holy.

Here, if anywhere in the whole range of Christian formulæ for creed and worship, the peril of familiarity is at its greatest: words lose their grip because we speak them so fast and frequently: we have handled these realities so often that we scarcely realise how great they are. When John Knox lay dying, he tried to say the Lord's Prayer: after "Our Father" he paused, and said, "Who can pronounce words so holy?" We need oftener that pause of reverent wonder, till the sacred words refresh their meaning in our hearts and open up their infinite significance. Here is a lesson in *ordered* prayer—God's Kingdom and glory first, our own wishes and needs second. Here is a lesson in *simple* prayer—no literary eloquence but the simple words of a simple trust. Yet was ever prayer

A Short Guide for Seekers

more *profound*? It puts much into little, and a Luke xi. whole scheme of theology and life into words which 1-13. a little child might breathe.

2. Our Lord also gave His disciples a *counsel* ^{To pray and not to faint.} *of perseverance*. It was in the form of the parable —though it is more the suggestion of a parable than a complete specimen—of the Friend at Midnight. Had He already learned in His own experience that the highest blessings do not always come quickly, and that the Father's Providence sometimes wears a look of unresponsiveness? In such a case, He seems to say, there is nothing to do but to keep on praying. After all, though sometimes there be "a frowning Providence," that is but the appearance of things; it is not the reality. And if a friend can get what he wants out of a surly neighbour by the sheer shamelessness ¹ of his asking, how much more will trusting hearts win an answer from a Father Who is generous and merciful! It is impossible to forget how much commentary upon this counsel is supplied by the Christian experience of the ages. If we turn to the saints for guidance in prayer, perhaps their most frequent advice is just—Keep on praying: even when you feel least like it, even when it seems to be of least use, keep on praying. "We may be assured," says Fénelon, "that we never need to pray so earnestly as when we cannot lay hold of any pleasure in prayer." "Do not stop," says Teresa, "come what will, follow what will, cost what it will." It is a wise counsel in a short Guide

¹ The true translation of the word rendered "importunity."

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
1-13.

To hope
and never
despair.

for Seekers, for if they obey it, then, whatever happens, it keeps them Seekers still.

3. But with the counsel of perseverance, our Lord gave His disciples *a message of childlike trust and hope*. Again we may believe that He spoke out of experience. He had been asking—and receiving: He had been seeking—and finding: He had been knocking—and the Father's door had been opened to Him: and being in communion and contact Himself with that Reality of Love, He could not doubt the welcome which was waiting there for all truly seeking hearts. There is something rebuking, and yet amazingly encouraging, in His serene confidence that there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. This does not mean that every request receives a specific answer in the shape in which we ask it: our Lord Himself asked three times that the cup might pass from Him, nevertheless the cup remained. Still, it is true that there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. Prayer is itself a moving of the door: we are *nearer* to God than if we had not prayed. Prayer is an education and illumination: we are *surer* of God than if we had not prayed. Prayer is an uplift and a transfiguration: we are *liker* God than if we had not prayed. Prayer is the way of discovery, the way of achievement, the way of reception, until our frail lives are filled with all the fulness of God. That was why Oliver Cromwell wrote to his daughter: "To be a seeker is to be of the best sect next to a finder; and such an one shall every faithful, humble seeker be at

A Short Guide for Seekers

the end. Happy seeker, happy finder! . . . Luke xi.
Dear heart, press on." I-13.

In this place of prayer, as already at the Jordan, we meet the Trinity—not as theory, not as philosophy, but as saving fact. Here on the threshold of the passage is Christ Himself in communion and commerce with the unseen, willing to put at the disposal of His disciples His matchless acquaintance with God, that acquaintance which was inherent in His very person and character as the Father's Son. Here too is the Father Whom Christ reveals, approachable, beneficent, holy and yet tender, whose door will never be besieged too long or too often by trusting hearts, and whose hospitality will never weary of needy and hungry guests. And here finally (v. 13) is the Holy Spirit, the promised gift, the best and highest boon. St Matthew's version has here the more general phrase "good things." Is this in St Luke an interpretative variation? The more we know our needs, the more we know our deepest need to be this that God should give us Himself. God is not completely a Saving Fact till He is an Indwelling Reality. He must save from the centre or He cannot fully save. And so the Redemption which began in the heart of the Father, and came near to men in the Incarnation of the Son, abides with them in the Indwelling of the Spirit, Happy seekers and happy finders, who press ever deeper into this fulness of truth and love. These things are more than orthodoxy: they are vision and life. Dear hearts, press on!

The Seeker's
Reward.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.

I-13.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Pray heartily, though thou thinkest it savour thee not : for it is profitable, though thou feel not, though thou see not, yea, though thou thinkest thou canst not. For in dryness and barrenness, in sickness and feebleness, then is thy prayer well-pleasant to Me though thou thinkest it savour thee nought but little. And thou shalt have Me to thy reward.

A Vision of Juliana of Norwich

XLII

STRONGER THAN THE STRONG

"And He was casting out a devil, and it was dumb. And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake: and the people wondered. But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils. And others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven. But He, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house, falleth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub. And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges. But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with Me is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."—LUKE xi. 14-26.

If we postpone till the next chapter discussion **Luke xi.** of v. 16, which belongs to the same sequence of **14-26.** thought as v. 29 ff, the rest in this section all arises **A Poisoned Arrow.** out of the foulest accusation ever brought against

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
14-26.

our Lord. One of His great cures had been wrought : a dumb man had been made to speak : and a wondering multitude had gathered round. But the friendly gazers were well mixed with foes and spies. St Luke's account of them is a trifle remote compared with that of St Matthew : there " the Pharisees " are plainly named—perhaps St Luke thinks that for his Gentile audience such details are of less account. But we can see their sour and grudging faces, and their words are a clue to the poison in their hearts. Controversy began, as sometimes is its ugly way, to discuss motive, and to attack character, and this emerged from the armoury of hate as the most deadly missile it could fling, " He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils." In its distorted way, this accusation perhaps conveyed unconsciously a certain tribute to Jesus : there was something princely about Him, something on the great scale : if they could not think of Him as from Above, perhaps He wielded the secrets of the Abyss : if they could not see God in Him, perhaps there was behind Him Beelzebub

" With Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies."

An
Argument
Shattered.

1. Our Lord ignored the sinister compliment and gave Himself to the demolition of their argument. He was gentle : yet the man was not to be envied who broke a lance with Him in debate. The first point in His reply was to reveal the inconsistency of their theory : " Every kingdom

Stronger than the Strong

divided against itself is brought to desolation **Luke xi.**
... if Satan be divided against himself"—and **14-26.**
weakens himself by driving out his own armies
from the lives he has captured—"how shall his
kingdom stand?" The core of this argument is
put into one phrase by Dr A. B. Bruce: "Satan
may be wicked, but he is not a fool." The second
point was to reveal their theory as not only in-
consistent but prejudiced: "if I by Beelzebub
cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them
out? therefore they shall be your judges." It
was an accepted ground in the controversy of
the day that there were Jewish Exorcists who
sometimes had some small measure of success:
what principle of discrimination had they, except
mere antagonism to Jesus, if they hailed one set
of cures as from Above, the other as from Beneath?
And His third point was to press home the positive
lesson: "If I with the finger of God cast out
devils, no doubt the Kingdom of God is come
upon you." Long ago Pharaoh's magicians (**Ex.**
viii. 19) had said to him, "This is the Finger of
God": they had seen that "terrible and fiery
Finger" moving in strange deeds of judgment.
Were not strange deeds of redemption and deliver-
ance a surer sign of that Finger's working?
Only hearts that had taken evil for their good
could deny it.

2. Having thus ground their argument to powder, **A Claim**
He stated His own claim. He spoke in parables, **stated.**
and yet His language was not altogether parable:
as the eyes of the onlookers had seen, the Stronger

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
14-26.

than the strong was already here. An old voice had come sounding down the ages: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the terrible be delivered? But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (Is. xlix. 24, 25, R.V. marg.). And the words leapt to Christ's heart as a forecast and summary of the work He was doing now. The reprieve of the "strong man armed" was at an end: he must waken to realise that war, red war, God's war, had begun; and a Stronger than himself was in the field to humble his pride and to deliver his captives. To quote Dr A. B. Bruce again, our Lord's claim was in two parts which made one whole—the first "I am Satan's enemy," the second "I am Satan's master." Some expositors think our Lord is referring to the hour of His temptation and His victory in the savage wilderness. It may be so—but the more obvious reference is to the victories which had been won before the eyes of the very people who were still listening to our Lord's words. The Enemy of all evil—and its Master, very sure of His victory: that is why it was well to be sure of being upon His side (v. 23): "he that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth"—he links himself with the forces that waste and ruin and not with those that save and heal. Greatheart is in the field: let those who value alike the happiness

Stronger than the Strong

of their own service and its fruitfulness in the world range themselves under His banner. Luke xi.
14-26.

There is an aspect of our Lord's character here which is not always adequately considered in our Christian thinking. "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,"—that is true so far as it goes: the children, the weak, the weary, the penitent, have good reason to bless God that it is true. But it is not all the truth. As Amiel says in his *Journal*, "there is no serious piety without heroism"; and in Christianity, which is the true and absolute religion, there is heroism because there was heroism in its Founder. The Book of Revelation, a heroic book written in a heroic hour, brings out this aspect of the Immortal Portrait in telling us of One "Whose eyes were as a flame of fire," and Who was "clothed with a vesture dipped in blood." And for such apocalyptic pictures there is abundant historical foundation in the plain narrative of the four Gospels, with all they tell us of One in Whom Strength was matched with Love, and Holiness with Tenderness, gentle to every hungry and seeking heart but terrible to the terrors that oppressed humanity.

3. There comes a point in this argument (v. 24) when our Lord seems to look away beyond His immediate audience, and to be watching the development of a spiritual drama—eerie and fascinating. He sees the ugly Thing driven out, roaming the deserts in search of a home, returning with stealthy footfall to its former abode, peering in to find it clean and sweet but tenantless, then raising a joyful signal to an evil company, who enter to

The Lion
of the Tribe
of Judah.

The Empty
House.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
14-26.

make it fouler and more hateful than ever before. There is nothing more terrible in our Lord's whole teaching: it is full of the imagination which made the parables a delight, but the imagination is here all aflame with the colours of the most tremendous moral facts. Had He some actual case in mind, some life cured and cleansed, once more taken captive by evil? Or was He thinking rather of Israel—a nation so often reformed by her prophets and moralists, and yet, as it now seemed, the worse rather than the better for it all? He had His own thoughts and He did not reveal them fully. Yet He revealed enough to teach His hearers and us a lesson that may not be forgotten.

Growing
Worse—
or Better?

It is possible for human beings to *grow worse*—even to grow better for a time and then to grow worse. Perhaps our easy-going optimism scarcely takes account of this: we have such faith in evolution that we forget the possibility of degeneration. The clear eyes of Christ missed nothing: He knew, and He warns us in truth and love. But it is possible for human beings to *grow better*, if only the house of the heart is not left ungarrisoned, but handed over for keeping to One Who is Stronger than all the might of evil. A negative religion always fails.

“The music of the Sirens found
Ulysses weak, though cords were strong;
But happier Orpheus stood unbound,
And shamed it with a sweeter song.
His mode be mine.”¹

¹ Coventry Patmore.

Stronger than the Strong

The Master put it one way when He showed the **Luke xi.** tragedy of the Empty House. St Paul put it in **14-26.** another when he wrote, "Walk in the Spirit and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

I have a Captain, and the heart
Of every private man
Has drunk in valour from His eyes
Since first the war began:
He is most merciful in fight,
And of His scars a single sight
The embers of our failing might
Into a flame can fan.

Thomas Toke Lynch

XLIII

A SIGN FOR ALL BUT THE BLIND

“And when the people were gathered thick together, He began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”—LUKE xi. 29-36.

Luke xi.
29-36.
A Cry of
the Human
Heart.

THE headline for this section has already been given in v. 16, in the announcement that “others, tempting Him, sought of Him a sign from heaven.” Our Lord, having disposed of the foul accusation that He was in league with the Powers of the Pit,

A Sign for All but the Blind

now turns to this other matter. Why was He so **Luke xi.** stern with those who sought a sign? It was surely **29-36.** not an *unreasonable* request. He made great claims for Himself. If His words mean anything at all they mean that He claimed to have a cosmic significance, and that His mission was of supreme ethical importance. Great discoveries are surely attested by radiant proofs: great claims should be supported by impressive credentials. And further, it was not an *unprecedented* request. Gideon had asked for a sign, and there is something appealing about the ancient story. He had set out upon a great adventure: vast things hung upon his mission; if God cared, surely He would let His servant know. And He did let His servant know: the wet fleece and the dry ground, the dry fleece and the wet ground,—Gideon saw them both, and went out on his enterprise with a stout heart. Why should it be right to ask for a sign then, and wrong to ask for it in the days of Christ? It is not a request entirely out of date even yet. Prayers go unanswered. Duty is loyally followed without visible success. The path is hard and dark: no miracles happen to illumine it. If God would only *do* something! So the human heart cries, and it is a pardonable demand.

We must assume that there was in this case an insincerity behind the demand. If, as seems likely, the two lines of attack came not only at the same time but from the same quarter—the one taking the form of a demand for a sign, the other accusing our Lord of being allied with the foul Fiend—then

No Sign
for the
Wilfully
Blind.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
29-36.

there was an insincerity which would have justified the strongest reprobation. To accuse Him of being an Agent of the Abyss, and yet at the same time to demand that He show credentials from Above—there was indeed the confusion of evil hearts, animated only by malice and heedless of what they said if only they could throw a poisoned dart successfully. It was difficult to devise a sign that should appeal to souls of that type. God's message was self-authenticating to hearts that were tender and consciences that were awake. If the stars could have shaped themselves into a handwriting of flame, or if the winds could have turned themselves into a trumpet to proclaim the name of Jesus, such a sign could have had no real converting power. Some might have been frightened into an outward submission; but will and motive would not have been changed. There was, then, no sign—no sign at least such as souls of that type were likely to understand: yet there were signs indeed, to be seen by all but the wilfully blind.

**A Sign for
the Penitent.**

1. *There was a sign for those who knew their sin.* "As Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation." St Luke's version is here much briefer than St Matthew's which introduces the point of the "three days and three nights": it is just possible, however, that Luke keeps the more primitive form of the saying. In any case the "three days and three nights" would have been unintelligible except in the light of later experience. The point which was intelligible at the moment was the call to

A Sign for All but the Blind

penitence: here, for all who cared to receive it, **Luke xi.** was a sign—One Who came and preached, saying, **29-36.** Behold, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye, and believe the Gospel. And that the call to penitence is the aspect of the illustration which Luke wishes to emphasise is evident from the way he takes up the strain again in v. 32: “the Men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a Greater than Jonas is here.” And even as the awakened people of the storied city accepted the sign of the prophet’s advent, and repented and were spared, so there were souls in Israel in Christ’s day who had sign enough and needed no other. They knew that God’s voice had spoken in Him, for their own consciences confirmed His message.

2. *There was a sign for those who knew their ignorance.* Time and again in history human hearts, eager for knowledge, have had an instinctive confidence in one who could teach them: seeking wisdom, they asked for no other credential than the unveiling of wisdom itself. Thus “the Queen of the South . . . came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.” And just as truth in some poor limited and broken form has been its own credential to the Queen of Sheba, and many other enquiring minds in every age, so Christ was His own sign to some at least who had found in Him the supreme Truth about God and themselves. The parable of the Sower, the parable of the Prodigal Son, or the message

A Sign for
the Enquir-
ing.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi. 29-36. of pardon, peace and hope, did they need signs to confirm them? The Sign was already here in Him Who spoke them: He revealed Reality to those who were real: He was the Truth to the seekers that were sincere.

The Great Claim again. There is no more startling expression of our Lord's self-consciousness than that which is contained here in the two phrases: "A Greater than Solomon is here," "a Greater than Jonas is here." We may soften the impact of the claim a little, if we note, with Dr Denney,¹ that the adjective is neuter, and render, "There is more than Jonah here, there is more than Solomon here." "Jesus does not say directly, I am greater than . . . Jonah or Solomon, but He declares that where He is a greater cause is represented, greater responsibilities are imposed, greater issues are at stake, than were involved by relation to the most sacred institutions or the most venerated personalities of former times." Yet even so, the claim in its essence is unabated: it is stupendous: it is only justified if He was what He professed to be. And if He was what He professed to be, was it egotism, or was it the fulfilment of His duty to men, was He any the less holy and humble of heart, when He stated the truth? To have perpetually disguised Himself would not have been fair to His own mission: it would not have been fair to the souls of men. For, as Dr Moffatt says,² "everything comes

¹ *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 280.

² *Reasons and Reasons*, p. 35, in a very fine study of the parallel passage in St Matt. xii.

A Sign for All but the Blind

back, in the end, to men's estimate of Him. If **Luke xi.** Jesus is *despised and rejected*, despising always comes **29-36.** first in the order of experience: outward rejection is invariably the result of some inward depreciation." It was to save men from that depreciation of Him that He grew ever more frank and urgent in His teaching about Himself—"a Greater" than the great ones of the past "is here": it was the truth, and life could never be again as if He had not come.

Between the preceding verses and vv. 34-36 the **Total** underlying connection is plain enough, though **Eclipse.** some of the phrases are hard to understand and apply, and v. 33 is possibly out of place, as it already has had a duplicate occurrence at viii. 16. The general idea is this—that since God's signs are not for the blind, it is needful to keep the spiritual vision clear and unclouded. The eye illumines the body, and physical sight is a parable of spiritual vision: the inward sight too may be clouded, distorted, misled—it may even turn to darkness. The corruption of the best is always the worst. Religion is the best thing in life: yet when it goes astray it may become one of the worst—it was threatening to do so in the days of our Lord. Conscience is the best thing in man: but crimes have been wrought in the name of conscience—that inward light may turn to deepest darkness. So He would have men search themselves and clear their vision. And, for those who do that God has signs, clear signs. There is the Sign of the Manger. There is the Sign of the Cross. There is

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi. the Sign of the Son of Man. The blind go past,
29-36. complaining that God does nothing. The clear-
 eyed souls draw near, and worship, and rejoice.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Some poor sinners are much like to a wanton boy at the maid's elbow, to blow out her candle as fast as she lights it at the fire. Convinced sinner, God lighteth thy candle, and thou puttest it out. God lighteth it again, and thou puttest it out. Take heed lest like the Egyptians you dwell all your days in darkness, and never see light more.

John Bunyan

XLIV

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB

“ And as He spake, a certain Pharisee besought Him to dine with him : and He went in, and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter ; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fools, did not He that made that which is without make that which is within also ? But rather give alms of such things as ye have ; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees ! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God : these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees ! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them. Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto Him, Master, thus saying Thou reproachest us also. And He said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers ! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe unto you ! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers : for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute : That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation ; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple : verily I say unto

St Luke i.—xi.

you, It shall be required of this generation. Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered. And as He said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to urge Him vehemently, and to provoke Him to speak of many things: Laying wait for Him, and seeking to catch something out of His mouth, that they might accuse Him."—LUKE xi. 37-54.

Luke xi.
37-54.
Warped
Vision.

WE have heard the Master's warning against the inward vision which is distorted by prejudice, or even blinded by love of sin. There is now waiting for us an instance of the vision which is thus warped and untrue. Many people used their eyes upon the Christ, and different people saw different aspects of Him. Common-place souls said, "Is not this the Carpenter?" Believing and loving hearts saw the Chiefest among Ten Thousand and the Altogether Lovely. But here, in a certain house into which Christ entered, was a narrow and prejudiced person, who saw in Him One not careful about ceremonial ablutions. Think of a man who had Christ under his roof—Christ Whom the ages had waited for, Christ Who was to win the love and adoration of a great multitude that no man can number, Christ the Personality of supreme significance, God's best gift, humanity's loftiest Representative—and the man's poor petty vision fastened upon the fact that He did not pour water over His hands before He sat down to meat. Here is the type of vision to which shadow is more than substance. Here is the groat which, when put close enough to the eye, hides the sun.

It is possible that our Lord omitted a ceremony

The Wrath of the Lamb

which in itself was not only harmless but pleasant **Luke xi.** and healthy, because He felt Himself in an **37-54.** atmosphere of rigid ceremonialism, and wished to **The Eyes** make a formal protest against the elevation of **that saw.** small things into the place of great. If, in the host of that day, we have a specimen of vision that is narrow and distorted, in our Lord Himself we have the supreme Example of the eye that is clean and the light that is clear. An element in clear sight is a just sense of proportion, and our Lord had that: to Him the great was great, and nothing was small but the small. We may believe that, as the Fourth Gospel tells us, judgment is given into the hands of the Son of Man, and that in regard to the uttermost issues of life He is competent to hold the scales of God.

1. Why was He so angry?—He Who was more **The Sin** patient than His disciples were with the inhospitable **against** Samaritan village. He was angry perhaps most **Light.** of all because the sin of Pharisees and Scribes was the sin against light: they ought to have known better: they had in their hands the material to teach them better. “Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness.” If they had taken an honest moment for an honest thought, they must have known that the God of the prophets could not be satisfied with this. The God of the prophets satisfied with hand-washings when justice and righteousness were being neglected—it was unthinkable to anyone who really thought. “Woe unto you, Pharisees! for

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
37-54.

ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgement and the love of God.” If they had again taken an honest moment for an honest thought, they must have known that the God of the psalmists could not be satisfied with this—the God Who called for the sacrifice of the broken heart and the contrite spirit. They loved the uppermost seat in the synagogue, probably a semi-circular bench facing the audience, where they could see and be seen: but had the Old Testament, which they professed to reverence, no warnings for the proud and no promises to the lowly? They decorated their lives with observances as graves were externally adorned with whitewash: but had not the holiest lessons of the past taught that outward observances were an offence and a snare unless a man’s heart and life were right with God? The emphasis of this type of religion was laid more and more upon outward conformity to rule: but it was in contempt of all the best signposts of bygone faith and experience, which consistently pointed inwards as the region with which God had most concern. Probably the true reading of v. 41 is one which harmonises it absolutely with this message. “Give alms of such things as ye have”; “give alms of the things that are within”: if we abide by the Greek words as they stand we must adopt some such form of words, which fits badly into the context. But the change of only one letter in the Aramaic form of the phrase gives, “*Cleanse what is within,*”¹

¹ So Moffatt, following Wellhausen.

The Wrath of the Lamb

and, behold, all things are clean unto you," which Luke xi. is of one piece with what comes before and after, 37-54. and with our Lord's consistent teaching.

2. The Master's anger awakened anger: it is a strong word which the indignant Scribe uses in v. 45: "Teacher, in speaking like this, thou insultest us also." Yet the man's blustering words could not hide the facts which our Lord laid bare with just severity, with an eye then as always to truth and not to peace, to the welfare of the poor and despised and not to the complacency of the proud and greedy. Very suggestive is the contrast between what the lawyers of the day heaped on men—burdens!—"ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers," and what they took from men—the key of privilege!—"ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." They added burdens, but they subtracted light and life, by making everything difficult, cumbrous, complicated, a task instead of a joy. And so our Lord on His own side, and these men on theirs, felt the inherent antagonism between His religious conceptions and theirs. They on their side (v. 53) began more eagerly to set traps and snares for His feet. He on His side saw that they were ripening towards judgment (v. 47): they were in the evil succession of those who slew the prophets: the cup of iniquity was becoming full. There has been much discussion of the phrase in v. 49: "Therefore also said the

The added
Burdens and
the stolen
Key.

St Luke i.—xi.

Luke xi.
37-54.

Wisdom of God." In Matthew's version these sombre strains are put into the lips of Christ Himself. Here it looks as if He were quoting some lost "Book of Wisdom," which made a terrible reckoning of the righteous blood spilt from Genesis to Chronicles—the two ends of the Jewish Canon—and foresaw a hapless generation which should suffer to pay for it all. It does not really matter whether this was a quotation or not: the Wisdom of God was speaking now; and even in His most tragic forebodings, the swift years were to prove Him not mistaken.

The Day
that burns
as an Oven.

Sometimes it happens so: there is a process of judgment which works itself out. It does so in the individual: there are Pharaohs who harden their hearts; and even when the fates overtake them, it is not the fates that they need to blame. It does so in nations and in races and in systems: there are long periods when iniquity seems to gather unchallenged and unchecked: then the hour of judgment falls, and God's cleansing fires are let loose to purge the world. It has happened so over and over again in history, and yet men think that the Day of the Lord is a dream.

Anger and
Pity.

Was there no compassion in the Master's anger? We may be sure there was infinite compassion. Dante saw so clearly the hard case of the hypocrites that he depicted them a painted people, toiling for ever under hoods of gold lined with lead—"O everlasting weary robe of state!" Do we think that the Saviour of men did not see the essential misery of those who had given themselves

The Wrath of the Lamb

over to unreality, to externalism, to the ever **Luke xi.** heavier yoke of a bondage which neither they nor **37-54.** their fathers had been able to bear? His severity was the severity of love : His words were the surgery of compassion, labouring for the life of souls. And if men, then or now, learn from His severity to flee to His mercy, they find none so kind or patient as He. He turns their religion from a pretence to a reality, from a burden to a joy. For such an experience the proudest Pharisee that yet lives in a proud world might cheerfully let go his pride and his merit, to win Christ and be found in Him.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

O Lamb of God, I cannot understand . . .
the mystery of Thy wrath : preserve me from
darkening counsel by words without knowledge.
Behold, I am vile : what shall I answer Thee ?
I will lay my hand upon my mouth. . . . O
Lamb of God, Who camest not to destroy
men's lives but to save them, take away the
sins of the world.

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